

# **Fetishism and Social Domination in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre**

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## **Declaration**

I, Chris O’Kane, hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

**Signature** ..... **Date** .....

**UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Summary

This thesis presents a comparative account of the theory of fetishism and its role in the social constitution and constituent properties of Marx's, Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's theories of social domination. It aims to bring this unduly neglected aspect of fetishism to the fore and to stress its relevance for contemporary critical theory.

The thesis begins with an introductory chapter that highlights the lack of a satisfactory theory of fetishism and social domination in contemporary critical theory. It also demonstrates how this notion of fetishism has been neglected in contemporary critical theory and in studies of Marxian theory.

This frames the ensuing comparative, historical and theoretical study in the substantive chapters of my thesis, which differentiates, reconstructs and critically evaluates how Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre utilize the theory of fetishism to articulate their theories of the composition and characteristics of social domination. Chapter 1 examines Marx's theory of fetish-characteristic forms of value as a theory of domination socially embedded in his account of the Trinity Formula. It also evaluates the theoretical and sociological shortcomings of *Capital*. Chapter 2 focuses on how Lukács' double-faceted account of fetishism as reification articulates his Hegelian, Marxian, Simmelian and Weberian account of dominating social mystification. Chapter 3 turns to Adorno's theory of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction and unpacks how it serves as a basis for his dialectical critical social theory of domination. Chapter 4 provides an account of how Lefebvre's theory of fetishism as concrete abstraction serves as the basis for a number of theories that attempt to socially embody an account of domination that is not overly deterministic. The critical evaluations in chapters 2-4 interrogate each thinker's conception of fetishism and its role in their accounts of the genesis and pervasiveness of social domination.

The conclusion of the thesis consists of three parts. In the first part, I bring together and compare my analysis of Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre. In part two, I consider whether their respective theories provide a coherent and cohesive critical social theory of fetishism and of the mode of constitution and the constituents of social domination. In part three, I move toward a contemporary critical theory of fetishism and social domination by synthesising elements of Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's theories with a model of social constitution, reproduction and domination modelled on Marx's account of the Trinity Formula.

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## **Introduction**

The Marxian theory of fetishism is certainly capable of describing the current economic and social crisis: volatile world markets and the sovereign debt crises have acted like autonomous entities, and their social repercussions possess the character of inverted forms of domination in which these collectively constructed social entities have turned back on the individuals who have constituted them. These circumstances are reflected in Marx's famous statement that 'magnitudes of value vary continually, independently of the foreknowledge and action of exchangers. Their own movement within society has for them the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them.'<sup>1</sup> Yet much contemporary critical social theory, despite the degree to which it now finds itself ill-suited to describe and understand the present socio-economic crisis, has moved away from drawing on Marx's theory of fetishism and social domination or subsequent Marxian social theories that utilised fetishism in their theories of social domination, diminishing the relevance such critical theory has to our present day.

Whilst on the whole it is surprising that the recent social and economic crisis has not contributed to reconsidering the relationship of critical theories to Marx<sup>2</sup>, the recent work of two of the leading figures of contemporary critical social theory might be seen as countervailing examples of this tendency. Both Axel Honneth and Moishe

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<sup>1</sup> Marx (1992, 176)

<sup>2</sup> This can be seen in the astonishing fact that neither of the three leading critical theory journals—*Constellations*, *Telos* and *Thesis Eleven*—have any articles on the social and economic crisis or its relation to critical theory in the period of 2008-2013. Furthermore, (1) the recent special issue of *Constellations* volume 19 issue 3 on 'rethinking critical theory' did not have any articles re-assessing the Marxian legacy of critical theory (2) the two recent issues of *Telos* (Winter 2009 and Summer 2011) on Adorno did not discuss Adorno's relation to Marx, political economy or domination. (3) As survey articles on contemporary critical theory by (Brincbat 2012) and (Piá Lara 2008) point out contemporary critical theory is not engaged with these theoretical approaches or questions.

Postone have formulated important theories that offer reinterpretations of what they construe as critical theory's classic thematic of reification, which itself can be said to have offered an interpretation of fetishism as a theory of social domination. Yet, despite this rapprochement with critical theory's Marxian legacy, both Honneth and Postone's work are inadequate for the task of a contemporary critical social theory of fetishism and social domination.

This is because on the one hand, Honneth's rejuvenation of reification acknowledges many of the problems of Lukács' account of the genesis and pervasiveness of reification.<sup>3</sup> However, these criticisms lead Honneth to abandon any account of supraindividual domination for an intersubjective account of reification. Thus any theory of the relationship between fetishism and social domination is eschewed for Honneth's problematic of recognition. As a result whilst such a theory may prove fruitful in approaching the way intersubjective relations dehumanise individuals, it is inadequate for addressing a theory of supraindividual social domination.

Moishe Postone's work, on the other hand, attempts to ground an account of social domination on his reinterpretation of Marx. Yet whilst Postone's work does focus on the question of supraindividual social domination, there are several reasons why it is unsatisfactory. In the first place, as Postone himself points out, his account of social domination is fragmentary and incomplete.<sup>4</sup> This has the consequence of making his account of the genesis and pervasiveness of social domination fall prey to many of the same criticisms that Honneth makes of Lukács' theory.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, Postone's work has been met with many perceptive criticisms that point to the weakness of his

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<sup>3</sup> See (Honneth 2008, 27-29) I provide my own account of these problems below.

<sup>4</sup> See (Postone 1996, 19-111)

<sup>5</sup> For instance like Honneth's criticism that 'It isn't clear from the text how' Lukács's 'social generalization' of reification 'theoretically occurs,' (Honneth 2008, 29). The same can be said of Postone's reinterpretation of Marx's theory of value as a theory of social domination. In Postone's account it is particularly not clear what drives and reproduces capital and consequently how this process constitutes social domination. This is due to the fact that: (a) despite Postone's interpretation of capital as a subject that possesses what he describes as an 'historically specific dynamic' and (b) the fundamental importance that Postone attributes to the historical specificity of abstract labour it is unclear how abstract labour and capital are constituted in their historical specificity and how this pervasive process, and its dynamic structures, compels and dominates society. (Postone admits the need to address this problem, 396-97). Yet at this point he has not and in doing so his interpretation of Marx mirrors Lukács by extending rather than developing the categories Marx presents in part one of *Capital*. I show how this method of Lukács's differs from Marx's below.

reinterpretation of Marx.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Postone's criticisms of 'traditional Marxism' and 'critical theory' prevent any possibility of a productive dialog between Marx and Marxian theories of social domination.

This means that Postone's own reinterpretation of Marx is inadequate and that he neglects, a strand of Marxian critical social theory which does exist that can be said to have grappled with the issue of fetishism and social domination, which may be helpful in addressing the theoretical deficits of his theory. For the thinkers involved, Marx's account of fetishism played a fundamental role in their theories of ideological mystification, and in their discussions of the constitution and constituent properties of capitalist social domination.

In this thesis I move toward developing a contemporary critical theory of fetishism and social domination that draws on Marx and Marxian theories of fetishism and social domination. I aim to bypass these weaknesses in Honneth and Postone's theory by eventually developing a theory of supraindividual social domination that is grounded on a coherent account of the way that domination is constituted and socially embodied.<sup>7</sup> I do this by focusing on bringing these Marxian theories of the fetishism and social domination to the fore, whilst also considering the contemporary relevance that their theories of fetishism and social domination may hold for contemporary critical theory.

This thesis is therefore concerned with a comparative history of the role played by the concept of fetishism in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre's theories of the constitution and constituents of social domination. In the latter fetishism is used as a theory to articulate the collective constitution of social phenomena that possess constituent autonomous and inverted properties that structure, compel and 'maim' individuals. While the term social domination is intended to convey that there is an integral link between the way a society is structured and those fetishistic types of domination that are held to be characteristic of this society.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See the criticisms of (Arthur 2004), (Bonefeld 2004), (McNally 2004) and others in *Historical Materialism* Volume 12 Issue 3. See also (Goldner 2005)

<sup>7</sup> By socially embodied I refer to the way in which theories of domination are said to be instantiated in the complex social world.

<sup>8</sup> My use of this term social domination is left deliberately open and is intended to bypass terms typically associated with the Marxian conception of social domination such as alienation or reification.

I choose to focus on these thinkers for several reasons; in the first place, they all offer theories of social domination in which the theory of fetishism is used to articulate how this domination is constructed and what it consists in.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, these theories are more theoretically complex and fully-fledged than other Marxian critical social theories of fetishism and social domination.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, the combination of these authors and the respective similarities and differences of their theories can provide an illuminating theoretical map of this topic whilst also shedding new light on and pointing to the new relevance of these authors's theories of social domination.

As I explain below in my literature review, although fetishism is often conflated with reification, I focus on uncovering these thinkers's distinct conception of fetishism for several reasons: (1) as Honneth and others such as Elbe, Colletti and Reichelt have pointed out, the theories of reification deployed by Lukács and the Frankfurt School are problematical because they overextend the pervasiveness of reification without adequately grounding it. Whilst fetishism is often conflated with these theories of reification, to disambiguate them may provide adequate grounding for a critical theory that does not offer a simplistic or a reductive theory of society. At the very least, I will substantiate their distinction by pointing to a different strand of fetishism and domination that might be drawn on. This is also connected to (2) in which I contend and I substantiate below in the literature review that receptions of theories of reification construe domination differently than the accounts of fetishism I will present in the thesis. This is because the aspects of fetishism that emphasise the autonomous function of things and compel individual actions in the form of personification provide an account of the dynamics of domination in a different manner than the receptions of reification which attribute these dynamics to things *as such* and describe domination in terms of humans being thingified or dehumanised. Both of which signal (3) that in contrast to accounts of alienation and reification that tend to treat fetishism in terms of its relation to a theory of dehumanisation, my study - in the context of a theory of constitution and of the constituent properties of social domination- examines

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<sup>9</sup> Thus other potentially interesting subjects such as Pashukanis' study of Law and Alfred Sohn-Rethel's study of epistemology remain outside the purview of this topic because of their focus on particular aspects of society

<sup>10</sup> For instance, it could also be argued that Guy Debord and Walter Benjamin offer theories of social domination that draw on fetishism. However, while Benjamin's account is certainly intriguing it remains unfinished, whereas as (Bunyard 2011) shows, Debord's notion of the spectacle is less complex and devotes much of its time to issues of historicity and temporality rather than domination.

fetishism as a theory which endeavours to explain how and why such a form of social domination is constituted rather than what it is (alienated human essence dominated by things). My distinct focus on the concept of fetishism and its distinction from reification is thus concerned with drawing out the articulation of the genesis, properties, dynamics and reproduction in these theories of social domination.

My approach is theoretical, comparative and broadly historical. It is theoretical in the sense that I aim to provide what I think to be an accurate and critical account of each thinker's conception of fetishism and of the role that fetishism plays in their theories of the constitution and of the constituents of social domination. It is comparative in the sense that I compare each respective theorist's conception of fetishism to that of the others, considering the particular role that fetishism plays in each theory and it is historical in the sense that I provide a conceptual 'history', or perhaps a mapping, a genetic account of how each of these thinkers has conceived fetishism and has utilised it in accounting for social domination.<sup>11</sup>

To that end I critically examine how these writers use fetishism in their respective theories of the constitution<sup>12</sup> and the constituents<sup>13</sup> of social domination. I track the ways in which these distinctive conceptions of fetishism and social domination compare with each other. Finally, I consider the coherence of these theories and their contemporary relevance.

The following thesis thus provides a substantial and original contribution in the following manner. (1) My comparative study will show and discuss how each thinker

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<sup>11</sup> Despite fetishism's importance to 'Western Marxism,' there is no work in English that examines the development of fetishism in 'Western Marxism.' Merleau Ponty, who coined the phrase 'Western Marxism' focuses on *The Adventures of the Dialectics*, Martin Jay focuses on totality, Russell Jacoby on *The Dialectic of Defeat* and Perry Anderson levelled a number of criticisms at the tradition in his *Considerations on Western Marxism*. This thesis takes inspiration from these approaches. However, my focus differs in two respects: (1) I begin with a substantive chapter on Marx and I trace the concept of fetishism from Marx through Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre's interpretations. (2) I narrow my field of examination from the rather broad category of 'Western Marxism', to a focus on thinkers who share a similar Hegelian interpretation of Marx, and who use fetishism as a central part of their social theory. The conceptual history of fetishism that I trace maps a concept that has not been utilised in any in-depth histories or studies on Marx and Western Marxism.

<sup>12</sup> By 'constitution' I refer to how the theory of fetishism, as an account of the ways in which a social relation between people becomes a social relation between things, constitutes these theories of social domination.

<sup>13</sup> By 'constituents' I refer to how the properties of these conceptions of fetishism are used to convey the way in which fetishism structures social domination.

conceives of fetishism and how each of these conceptions of fetishism functions as a basis for their respective theories of the construction and characteristics of social domination. (2) I will criticise each thinker's conception of fetishism, focussing on the ways in which it fits into their theories of the constitution and of the constituents of social domination. (3) I will study Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre in a comparative manner from this perspective; such an analysis has never been performed before. (4) The thesis will conclude by presenting original considerations on the coherence of these theories as models of fetishism and social domination, and in regard to the relevance of these theories for articulating a contemporary critical social theory of fetishism and social domination that moves towards developing a conception of fetishism and social domination standing as an alternative to Honneth's and Postone's theories. I believe a contemporary critical theory of this sort, in contrast to much contemporary critical social theory, could prove illuminating in articulating accounts of how, why and of what nature are the current forms of domination and of the crises we face. My concluding considerations intend to highlight the pertinence such aspects of these authors's thought have for such a theory. They pinpoint also to a way they could be combined in order to form the basis for a contemporary theory of fetishism and social domination.

## I Literature Review

The focus of this thesis is therefore different from the voluminous and disparate body of extant writings on fetishism which (a) use the term in a manner that differs from its Marxian origins;<sup>14</sup> or (b) treat fetishism as exemplary of a different concept, such as 'false consciousness', 'ideology' or 'reification', whilst presenting surveys of the latter concepts.<sup>15</sup> In what follows I outline a conceptual typology of how these different

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<sup>14</sup> Many accounts of commodity fetishism say more about the particular disciplines they were written within than they do about the phenomenon itself. This is particularly true in disciplines such as literary theory or cultural studies, where the Marxian term is often applied in a way that has little to do with the Marxian conception of fetishism. Several examples suffice: *Coffee and Commodity Fetishism*, *From Hegel to Madonna*: *Toward a General Economy of Commodity Fetishism* and *Yoga and Fetishism: Reflections on Marxist Social Theory*. These approaches are not relevant to this study.

<sup>15</sup> See (Rosen 1996) and (Vandenberghe 2009)

interpretations construe fetishism.<sup>16</sup> I then discuss how the historical and conceptual accounts that fall into these types address the development of the concept of fetishism in Marx and Western Marxism. This will demonstrate that these accounts do not provide an exclusive focus on fetishism in terms of a theory of the constitution and of the constituent properties of social domination but instead treat it as a metonymy representing a larger concept. It will also show that there is not a comparative theoretical account of how the distinct concept of fetishism is conceived and deployed in theories of social domination

### **1.1 Conceptual Typologies of Fetishism**

Norman Geras's classic article on fetishism 'Essence and Appearance: Aspects of Fetishism in Marx's Capital'<sup>17</sup> presents a distinction that provides a convenient means of framing the different conceptions of fetishism. Geras distinguishes between two distinct aspects of fetishism: mystification and domination. The different interpretations that I will now outline can be seen to correspond to Geras' distinction, as they either conceive fetishism primarily as constitutive of a type of mystification, as a type of domination, or as a combination of the two.

### **1.2 Fetishism as False Consciousness**

The interpretation of fetishism as 'false consciousness' has a long history and can be seen as far back as Karl Kautsky's highly influential *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*.<sup>18</sup> This conception is now prevalent among Anglophone and analytic

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<sup>16</sup> My typology does not address Lacanian interpretations of Marx. To my knowledge this interpretation does not engage with conceptual accounts of fetishism in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre. Žižek's scattered remarks are an exception to this, however since these remarks do not add up to a detailed study of these figures, they are too fragmentary to warrant their own typology.

<sup>17</sup> (Geras 1971)

<sup>18</sup> 'Characteristics which had appeared mysterious because they were not explained on the basis of the relations of producers with each other were assigned to the natural essence of commodities. Just as the fetishist assigns characteristics to his fetish which do not grow out of its nature, so the bourgeois economist grasps the commodity as a sensual thing which possesses preter-sensual properties.' (Kautsky 1903) from [www.Marxists.org](http://www.Marxists.org). This interpretation can also be seen in the canonical Marxist accounts of Sweezy. For a further discussion of these accounts see (Geras 1971) and (Rubin 2007)



philosophical accounts of fetishism.<sup>19</sup> The most prominent examples of such interpretation include those of the important analytic Marxists G.A. Cohen and Jon Elster. We can see two prevalent explanations of why fetishism is false consciousness in Cohen's and Elster's work. For Cohen, fetishism is a form of false consciousness, because of the illusory independence that fetishised commodities possess.<sup>20</sup> Elster describes this illusion in a similar fashion with recourse to a naturalisation and an embodied fallacy.<sup>21</sup> In fetishism as 'false consciousness', fetishism is therefore seen as a mystified type of ideological false consciousness that veils domination in capitalist society. Fetishism is thus conceived as an epistemological error, or as what Elster calls a 'cognitive illusion'<sup>22</sup> that is generated by the complex appearance of the capitalist mode of production; an illusion that also leads to these appearances being naturalised. In this account, fetishism consists in a category mistake concerning what Michael Rosen terms a 'theoretical illusion about the economy'<sup>23</sup> that conceives of the exchange value that commodities possess as being intrinsic to those commodities, instead of seeing it as something that is produced by exploited human labour. In some accounts, once this mistake is corrected the fetishism of commodities is dispelled and de-naturalised. In others, this illusion is objectively generated by capitalist production.<sup>24</sup> In both cases, fetishism is an illusion about conceptions of capitalist social production: an illusion that is generated by the mystified appearance of the capitalist circulation process. It is not something inherent to capitalist social production, and nor is it the mode of social domination that is constitutive and constituted by capitalist social production.

### **1.3 Althusserian Conceptions of Fetishism**

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<sup>19</sup> See also (Eyerman 1981), (Pines 1993), (Gabel 1975) and (Rosen 1996)

<sup>20</sup> 'Commodities possess exchange-value, and capital is productive. But these powers belong to them only by grace of the material process. Yet they appear to inhere in them independently of it. That appearance is fetishism....The illusion is that it has... power independently, whereas in fact it is delegated by material production.' (Cohen 2000, 116)

<sup>21</sup> Elster lucidly states: 'by this [fetishism] Marx means that the social relations of men come to appear as the (natural) properties of objects.' Thus, '[c]ommodity fetishism is the belief that goods possess value just as they have weight, as an inherent property.' (Elster 1985, 95)

<sup>22</sup> Elster (1985, 99)

<sup>23</sup> (Rosen 1996, 294)

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of both sides see (Rosen 1996, 200-219)

As the name implies, the Althusserian conception of fetishism was developed by Louis Althusser in the 1960s.<sup>25</sup> Althusser argued that the aspect of alienation in Marx's conception of fetishism was a vestige of the Hegelian legacy of the young Marx's thought and that it was separate from Marx's scientific critique of political economy. Fetishism was consequently seen as irrelevant to Marx's critique of political economy; so much so that Althusser even argued that the first chapter of *Capital* could be skipped.<sup>26</sup> He later amended his view that there was an epistemological break between the young Marx and the mature Marx. Nevertheless, in his interpretation, fetishism is a trans-historical form of mystification that veils production, and which is of secondary importance to the later analysis presented in *Capital*. Marx's criticism of the fetishism of commodities therefore 'replaces the false conception of this 'economy' as a relation between things by its true definition as a system of social relations.'<sup>27</sup> This unveils fetishism because: 'A social ('human') relation cannot therefore be found among 'things' in general, but only behind the thing of this capitalist relation.'<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the conceptions of fetishism in Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre, Althusserian Marxists also treat fetishism as a concept that is specific to Marx's account of the labour process rather than something that is indicative of fetishised social totality.<sup>29</sup>

These interpretations of fetishism as 'false consciousness' and the Althusserian interpretation of fetishism differ from the other prevalent strands of commentary on fetishism: fetishism as 'alienation', fetishism as 'reification' and fetishism as 'value'.<sup>30</sup> In

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<sup>25</sup> (Althusser 2005; Althusser and Balibar 2009; Balibar 2007)

<sup>26</sup> 'The greatest difficulties, theoretical or otherwise, which are obstacles to an easy reading of *Capital* Volume One are unfortunately (or fortunately) concentrated at the very beginning of Volume One, to be precise, in its first Part, which deals with 'Commodities and Money'. I therefore give the following advice: put the whole of Part One aside for the time being and begin your reading with Part Two.' (Althusser 1969, 2)

<sup>27</sup> (Althusser 2005, 216)

<sup>28</sup> (Althusser 2005, 217)

<sup>29</sup> In this view, Marx's conception of fetishism 'does not consist of a *general reification* of all relationships, as some humanist interpretations of Marx argue, but only of this particular relationship.' (Althusser 2005, 313)

<sup>30</sup> As G. Petrovic points out in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* there is often an overlap between conceptions of alienation, reification and fetishism. Reification and fetishism are often treated as types of alienation, fetishism is treated as synonymous with reification, or they are all treated interchangeably. Sometimes all of these overlaps occur in the course of one article. There are, however, grounds for distinguishing these types of interpretations of fetishism.

these interpretations fetishism is conceived as a central aspect of Marx's thought and as being integral to his theory of social domination. However, these interpretations also treat fetishism as constitutive of the concepts that they use to characterise this theory of social domination.

#### **1.4 Fetishism as Reification**

Fetishism as reification was first conceived in what many consider to be the founding document of Western Marxism: Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*.<sup>31</sup>

In this type of interpretation of fetishism the influence of Lukács' theory of reification leads to the term 'fetishism' being used interchangeably with 'reification.' In these conceptions fetishism and reification are treated as: (a) synonymous terms that describe the transformation of social processes into things which dominate and deceive people as a form of mystified false consciousness;<sup>32</sup> or alternatively fetishism is treated as (b) half of the basis for Lukács's and the Frankfurt school's Weberian Marxist theory of reification.<sup>33</sup> In all of these instances, reification is said to be synonymous or continuous with the aspects of fetishism that it draws from Marx and constitutive of a theory of social domination and of mystified false consciousness.<sup>34</sup> Some people who can be grouped into this strand of interpretation also contend that Lukács's theory of reification somehow discovered or at least anticipated Marx's theory of alienation prior to the discovery of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> (Lukács 1972) The concept is also used by leading Western Marxists such as Karl Korsch, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jurgen Habermas in their respective social theories to signify objective and subjective types of social domination. The ways these uses differ from Lukács's deserve a study of their own.

<sup>32</sup> See (Cook 1996)

<sup>33</sup> Prominent examples include (Honneth 2008, 97), (Wiggershaus 1995, 80), (Jay 1986; Jay 1996), (Cook 2004), (Dupree 1988), (Grondin 1988) For Lukács and the Frankfurt School as Weberian Marxists see (Löwy 1996) and (Dahms 2011) Some of these works complicate the issue to some degree by treating fetishism as part of the basis for theories of reification that encompass Marx, Weber and other theories.

<sup>34</sup> These conceptions of fetishism as reification are particularly prominent in work that is conceived from within or that focuses on the Frankfurt School.

<sup>35</sup> See Harry Dahms's statement that 'At the time, Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* with their emphasis on the category of *alienation* had not been discovered yet, and when Lukács wrote *History and Class Consciousness*, he was not familiar with Marx's earlier critique of political economy in terms of alienation. Yet he was able to

Thus, despite (a) its literal meaning – which is usually traced to the Latin term *res* and is defined as the transformation of human processes into things or the confusion of human processes with things – or (b) its general use which includes describing society as thingified (signifying that social relations between people are mediated by or take place through the exchange of things) or (c) that society is fragmented, accounts of fetishism as reification adopt Lukács's widespread use of the term and apply it to other thinkers' entire theories of social domination. This entails confusing the part with the whole in analyses of other thinkers where the transformation of human processes into things, the mediation of social relations between things or social fragmentation forms an *aspect*, but not the entirety, of the majority of these thinkers' social theories of domination. As a result, the term that designates what mediates social relationships – reification – is often conflated with how, why and in what way social relationships are mediated in this manner i.e. through the personified properties of things.

### **1.5 Fetishism as Alienation**

The interpretation of fetishism as 'alienation' was triggered by the discovery of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* following the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*. The place that alienation has in Marx's later writings became a matter of contention during the debates between Humanist and Althusserian interpretations of Marx, but there now seems to be a general acknowledgement that fetishism relates to alienation. There are however a number of different conceptions of how they relate, and all of them depend on how alienation is conceived.

What I will term the classic Marxist Humanist conception of fetishism as 'alienation' was initially formulated by Western Hegelian Marxists.<sup>36</sup> In this interpretation, alienation is seen as the core problematic of Marx's thought. Marx's

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reconstruct Marx's critique of alienation as the foundation for the critique of commodity fetishism.' (Dahms 2001, 102) See also (Vandenberghe 2009, 147), (Grimes, and Simmons 1970), (Patnaik 2009) as well as (Arato 1979) These interpretations differ with Lukács' own comments in the 1967 preface to *History and Class Consciousness* that his theory of reification commits the fundamental and crude error of equating alienation with the Hegelian concept of objectification. (Lukács 1972, XXIV)

<sup>36</sup> This account can be seen in the classic Marxist humanist works of Henri Lefebvre, Herbert Marcuse, and Eric Fromm. For a similar interpretation from this era, from a non-Hegelian Marxist standpoint, see: Lucien Goldmann and Daniel Bell.

formulation of the theory of alienation in *the Manuscripts* is thus seen as the key formulation of this problematic. Marx's later focus on political economy, on the other hand, is seen as the less expansive, 'economist' conception of alienation. In these accounts the classic formulation of alienation is said to underlie Marx's entire critique of political economy. Fetishism is therefore interpreted as the economic type of alienation. This analysis is concisely summarised in Henri Lefebvre's statement that 'fetishism is the economic form of alienation.'<sup>37</sup> In this interpretation, alienation is an objective and subjective state generated by capitalist production in which humans are alienated from their products and cut off from their human essence.<sup>38</sup>

A position similar to this classic Marxist humanist viewpoint was also taken up as a counterpart to Althusser. This viewpoint emphasises a strong continuity between Marx's theory of alienation and fetishism. Fetishism is designated as a sub-species of alienation. Thus as in the classical Marxist Humanist interpretation, fetishism consists in alienation and underlies Marx's critique of political economy. This can be seen among other places in Bertell Olmann's work on alienation,<sup>39</sup> which follows the classical humanist view that Marx's theory of alienation is the core problematic of his thought.<sup>40</sup> What Olmann terms fetishism and reification merely represent Marx's later formulations of alienation.

A thinner conception of fetishism as 'alienation' can also be found in works on Marx. These works argue for continuity between the young and later Marx, but in contrast to the other accounts of fetishism as 'alienation', they also emphasise important developments that give fetishism a conceptual and explanatory complexity that is lacking in *The Manuscripts*. In this strand, Marx's theory of alienation might not include or emphasise the alienation of human essence and consists solely in the way that labour becomes an alien form of domination that is external to the human social relations that constitute it.<sup>41</sup> Prominent examples of this strand include the work of Lucio Colletti<sup>42</sup>, Norman Geras<sup>43</sup> and Fredy Perlman.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> (Henri Lefebvre 2008a)

<sup>38</sup> Fromm shares this view with the additional contention, as evident in one of his more popular books *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, that the alienation of humans from their products is illusory. See (Fromm 2006)

<sup>39</sup> (Ollman 1977)

<sup>40</sup> Other examples from this period include (Meszaros 2005), (Wilde 1998), (Avineri 1968) and (Eagleton 2007) For a recent example see (Sayers 2011)

<sup>41</sup> See (Geras 1971)

<sup>42</sup> (Colletti 1973), (Colletti 1989)

For the majority of these views, fetishism as ‘alienation’ overlaps with fetishism as ‘reification’ on one of two points. Unlike fetishism as ‘reification’ these accounts often treat mystification as a separate but related to fetishism. Like fetishism as ‘reification’, fetishism as ‘alienation’ provides a constitutive account of fetishism in which human social relations constitute external and alien entities that dominate society. However, these accounts are often centred on substantiating the underlying continuity between the early and later Marx rather than articulating how the theory of fetishism fits into Marx’s critique of political economy. As a result they tend to refrain from an explanation of how or why the characteristics and constitution of social domination offered in Marx’s theory of fetishism differ from Marx’s theory of alienation,<sup>45</sup> let alone providing a comparative account of fetishism and social domination in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre.

### **I.6 Fetishism as Value**

The interpretation of fetishism as value is exemplary of what is termed value-form theory.<sup>46</sup> Value-form theory’s founding documents are generally attributed to Soviet Scholars in the 1920s, who were later purged by Stalin.<sup>47</sup> The Japanese Ono school also began working on Marx’s theory of value following World War II. However, value-form theory did not receive much attention until the 1960s in the context of the formation of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre*, which apart from singular exceptions like Coletti, can be said to have popularised value-form theory.

Many of the foremost pioneers of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* were students of Adorno, including Alfred Schmidt, H.G. Backhaus, Helmut Reichelt and Hans-Jürgen

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<sup>43</sup> (Geras 1971)

<sup>44</sup> (Perlman, 2007)

<sup>45</sup> (Colletti 1973) and Perlman’s writings on Marx are an exception. How they differentiate Marx’s account of alienation in *The Manuscripts* and *Capital* is discussed in my chapter on Marx.

<sup>46</sup> This term designates an array of theorists who offer a different interpretation of Marx’s theory of value. Notable contemporary figures who can be grouped into this school include Michael Heinrich, Dieter Wolf, Ricardo Belofiore, Patrick Murray, Fred Moseley, Moishe Postone, Chris Arthur, Gert Reuten and Werner Bonefeld and the Capital and Class / Open Marxism school.

<sup>47</sup> Foremost among these works is (Rubin 2007) and (Pashukanis 1987) Ryzanov’s MEGA were also influential to the methodology and philological approach taken up by value-form theory.

Krahl. These students seized on the Marxian concepts that Adorno used in his work as a basis for their studies of Marx. To study Marx they used philological methods that utilised previously neglected documents from Marx's later research on the critique of political economy, such as *The Grundrisse* and the first edition of *Capital*.

In this interpretation, fetishism is conceived as a central component of Marx's monetary theory of value. This relationship is well summarised in Kuruma's concise formulation that Marx's section on the value-form provides an analysis of *how* money develops; the theory of fetishism describes *why* money develops.<sup>48</sup> Fetishism is thus conceived as articulating Marx's theory of value as a 'real' or 'practical' abstraction generated by the social form of capitalist production in which reified social relations personifies things, culminating in the abstract social domination of capital.

The value-form interpretation can be seen to further distinguish itself from the other two typologies that conceive of Marx's theory of fetishism as a central component of his theory of domination. In contrast to the classic Marxist Humanist conception of fetishism as 'alienation', value-form theorists have emphasised the shifting and developing nature of Marx's thought. Along with the thin conceptions of fetishism as 'alienation' this strand therefore emphasises the differences in development and explication between the young and mature Marx.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to the fetishism as 'reification' reading, value-form theorists also make a distinction between fetishism, reification and mystification in recent studies.<sup>50</sup> Yet, as I will show in the next section, this interpretation predominantly focuses on Marx with little comparative work on Marx and his interpreters.

As can be seen, all of these types treat fetishism as constitutive of a larger conception of mystification or domination. This is reflected in historical or comparative accounts of fetishism.

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<sup>48</sup> See (Kuruma 1957)

<sup>49</sup> Much of the work in this typology is based on emphasising the differences between different editions of *Capital*.

<sup>50</sup> Examples include: (Arthur 2013), (Belliofiore, 2011, 2012), (Heinrich 2012), (Clegg 2007), (Schulz 2013), (Gray 2013) and (Ehrbar 2009) who distinguish between the fetish character of commodities, the fetishism of political economists and reification. This distinction is also similar to the conception of reification and fetishism as chiasmus in *Valences of the Dialectic*. (Jameson 2009)

## 2 Conceptual Histories

Despite the lack of a study of the development of the concept of fetishism from Marx through Western Marxism, a number of the foremost studies of the thinkers concerned assert similarities or differences between Marx and his interpreters in their respective conceptions of fetishism. There are also studies that provide continuous and discontinuous conceptual histories in these conceptual types that provide historical accounts of concepts that include fetishism. Yet, as I will show, neither of these types provides a sophisticated comparative history of the concept of fetishism or its role in theories of the construction and characteristics of social domination.

### 2.1 Conceptual Continuity

Accounts of conceptual continuity between Marx and the figures associated with Western Marxism can fall into the following brackets. Historians of ideology such as Michael Rosen trace their conception of fetishism as ‘false consciousness’ through Marx, Adorno and Benjamin;<sup>51</sup> other studies assert continuity in fetishism as ‘reification’ between the work of Marx, Lukács and Adorno.<sup>52</sup> Other studies of Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre describe the continuity of their theory with Marx’s theory of alienation or estrangement.<sup>53</sup> Finally, some value-form theorists stress similarities in themes between Marx, Lukács and Adorno.<sup>54</sup> In many instances, these characterisations are hampered by the lack of an in-depth discussion of what the conceptions of fetishism, reification or alienation and estrangement consist in. Instead, the usual procedure is to assert continuity by presupposing a definition. This tends to be an expansive thematic definition, based on themes or conceptions that these

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<sup>51</sup> For an opposing view see (McCarney 1980a) *Social Theory and The Crisis of Marxism*. Available at [www.josephmccarney.com](http://www.josephmccarney.com)

<sup>52</sup> See (Arato 1979; Wiggershaus 1995; Cook 1996; Cook 2004)

<sup>53</sup> For Lukács see (Arato 1979) For Adorno see (Benzer 2011) and (Cook 1996; Cook 2004) For Lefebvre see (Elden 2004) and (Jay 1986)

<sup>54</sup> Studies in this strand focus primarily on philological studies of Marx. So they have not provided any in-depth studies of other figures’ theory of fetishism. The closest that comes to comparative accounts can be seen in Backhaus and Reichelt’s frequent use of Adorno for their exegesis of Marx’s theory of value. For a similar contemporary comparison see two recent articles by Bonefeld on Adorno in (Holloway, Matamoros, and Tischler 2008) and Bonefeld (2012) For a comparison between Marx and Lukács see (Postone 2003)



theories hold in common, or which relies on claims of the theorist concerned that he or she is faithfully using the concept concerned.<sup>55</sup> In order to demonstrate how these types of continuity are deployed in a historical study I will turn to Federic Vandenberghe's *A Philosophical History of German Sociology*, which as the most in depth example of such a historical study, will demonstrate how such an approach prevents a close, rigorous, and comparative analysis of fetishism as a theory of the constitution and of the constituent properties of social domination.

In his 'philosophical history' Vandenberghe maps the concept of reification from Marx through Simmel, Weber, Lukács, Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas.<sup>56</sup> In order to do so, Vandenberghe offers an expansive thematic definition of reification that incorporates the differences in each respective thinker's conceptions of social domination into his own conception of reification. Part of this expansive thematic definition includes grouping alienation and fetishism under the rubric of reification. In the course of the study Vandenberghe also makes frequent conceptual missteps that undermine his definitions of concepts and of the relations between concepts.

These errors, together with Vandenberghe's expansive thematic definition of reification, can first be seen in his discussion of Marx in the introduction to this book. Vandenberghe begins by following Gillian Rose in pointing out that Marx only used the German word for reification (*verdinglichung*) twice; yet by the next page, and without any explanation as to why he has done so, one finds that he has moved to defining Marx's social theory of domination solely in terms of reification. Vandenberghe then adds more unwarranted attributes to this definition of reification by amalgamating the related phenomenon of 'personalization' into this nebulous and unfounded definition.<sup>57</sup> This culminates in Vandenberghe's development of a conception of reification that is

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<sup>55</sup> This may be one of the reasons that Lukács or classic Marxist Humanist conceptions of fetishism have become popular conceptions of fetishism.

<sup>56</sup> The English translation is a truncated version of his longer two-volume study.

<sup>57</sup> 'Reification is the opposite of personalization and is therefore conceptually related. While reification transforms something which is not a thing into a thing, personification transforms that which is not a person into a person [...] Reification in Marx's sense, can also be seen as personification: social or pseudo-natural forces are perceived and understood as quasi-human forces that rule the world.' ((Vandenberghe 2009, 9)

expansive enough to include a methodological and social conception, each of which features several subtypes.<sup>58</sup>

Like his discussion of reification, Vandenberghe's studies of individual thinkers are also loose. Having defined Marx's social theory in terms of reification in the introduction, his chapter on Marx begins by defining all of Marx's work through the core theme of alienation.<sup>59</sup> From there Vandenberghe moves to a discussion of the development of Marx's work, wherein he argues that Marx's thought moved from a philosophical-anthropological approach to a historical-structuralist one and remained based upon an underlying humanism and a conception of alienation. Along the way the terms alienation, reification and fetishism are treated interchangeably. The term 'fetishist-reification' is eventually coined to describe the fetishism of commodities. Yet despite this terminological fusion, Vandenberghe's able exposition of five aspects of fetishism – amongst which are included domination and mystification – omits a discussion of how his characterisation of the different aspects of fetishism relate to reification or alienation. Nor is it clear how fetishism is constituted, how it is constitutive, or how it relates to other aspects of *Capital*. We are left to assume they are somehow synonymous and stand at the core of Marx's theory.

Vandenberghe concludes with a reconstruction of Marx's thought. This reconstruction is based on the theme of inversion that runs throughout Marx's work, and on what he defines as the three aspects of Marx's theory of reification: alienation, exploitation and fetishism. Vandenberghe places these aspects together in a synoptic table, in which alienation is defined as social reification and is confined to the production process. Commodity fetishism is termed the reification of consciousness and is treated as a mystified veil that is generated by the production process; this however goes against his earlier account of fetishism as including mystification and

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<sup>58</sup> 'Methodological reification subtypes are the critique of reism and naturalism. Social reifications are the social critique, the critique of false consciousness and the critique of science.' (Vandenberghe 2009, 31)

<sup>59</sup> 'All Marx's work can be systematically reconstructed through the single, central concept of alienation. The theory of alienation, as Marx first developed it in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, is the core of his thought [...] one might say that most, if not all of Marx's thought, as well as the critical categories of *Capital*, are already discernable in their early form in this text [...] the *Manuscripts* anatomy in effects provides a key to the 'anatomy' of *Capital*.' (Vandenberghe 2001, 33)

domination.<sup>60</sup> In the end, we are left with a rather vacuous summary of Marx's social theory, according to which 'reification, defined as the imposition of social order through the external constraint of material forces, that results from and leads to the reduction of action to its solely strategic dimension, is not history's last word.'<sup>61</sup>

Moving to Lukács, Vandenberghe makes a strong claim for continuity between his work and that of Marx and other Western Marxists. In Vandenberghe's view there is continuity between Lukács's theory of reification and Marx's theory of fetishism.<sup>62</sup> At the same time Lukács's theory of reification forms the Kuhnian paradigm of western Marxism.<sup>63</sup> For Vandenberghe, Lukács's theory of reification therefore 'generalizes the theory of commodity fetishism beyond the field of economics.'<sup>64</sup> This, he claims, is done in an objective and subjective manner: objectively 'reification is related to the autonomous functioning of market pseudo-things as 'second nature';<sup>65</sup> subjectively, 'reification refers to alienation, the objectifying attitude that humans adopt towards the products of work that confront them as foreign objects.'<sup>66</sup> Thus, in a passage that

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<sup>60</sup> Compare Vandenberghe's earlier definition of three of the facets of commodity fetishism (Vandenberghe 2009, 62) in that social relations between people are mediated by economic relations between things, and become confused with them; that commodities exist independently as pseudo- persons; that things, commodities and their movement lead, dominate and direct men, not vice versa, with his later definition of commodity fetishism in the synoptic table on (Vandenberghe 2009, 66) There he writes that 'commodity fetishism, defined as a well-founded distortion of perception induced by the structure of the market economy, makes practical processes and social relations disappear behind a veil of naturalness and materiality'. In the first discussion, fetishism would seem to include alienation and domination. In the second, it seems to solely consist in false consciousness. Yet Vandenberghe provides no discussion or grounds for this change.

<sup>61</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 68)

<sup>62</sup> In the first part of the essay, entitled 'The Phenomenon of Reification', Lukács develops his concept of reification on the basis of the Marxist analysis of commodity fetishism. The central idea of this analysis is that in an economic system that is totally oriented around market production of exchange values, human actions are coordinated by the market, with the result that human social relations take the form of an abstract and pseudo-natural objectivity which disguises the trace of its origins and social determinants behind a rigorous system of autonomous and oppressive laws (Vandenberghe 2009, 146) Note that this definition of fetishism possesses some of the characteristics of Vandenberghe's original definition in which fetishism possesses the attributes of autonomous domination, rather than his second definition which treated fetishism solely as a form of mystification.

<sup>63</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 140)

<sup>64</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 146)

<sup>65</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 146)

<sup>66</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 146)

synthesises his theoretical conflation and missteps Vandenberghe makes the following claim:

[I]nspired by Simmel, Lukács deduces and rediscovers the theory of alienation of labour from the theory of commodity fetishism. *Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 were only published in 1937, Lukács could not have known them any more than Simmel. However, in this instance, it is less through a synthesis of Marx and Simmel- as was the case in *Towards the Sociology of Modern Drama*-- than through a fusion of the Marxist category of 'abstract work' and Weber's category of formal rationality that Lukács reconstructs the theory of economic alienation<sup>67</sup>

In Vandenberghe's view this fusion of the Marxist category of abstract labour and Weberian formal rationality is achieved through what he terms Lukács' s theory of the 'cash nexus.'<sup>68</sup> Vandenberghe argues that Lukács follows Marx's theory of commodity fetishism – and the theory of alienation that Lukács discovers in it – in holding that the 'coordination of action....is imposed from outside by the autonomous movement of things on the market. (*cash nexus*)'.<sup>69</sup> This leads 'actors' to 'adopt the objectifying attitude of instrumental-strategic action towards themselves and others' and for 'thingness' to become the determining modality of thought.' It is also where the Weberian conception of formal rationality is fused with Marx.

Vandenberghe's account of Lukács's theory of reification therefore posits a strong continuity between Lukács's and Marx's conception of commodity fetishism and alienation as subtypes of their theories of reification. No consideration is given to how Lukács's conception of reification may differ from Marx's conception of commodity fetishism. Furthermore, as with his account of Marx, no space is devoted to how Lukács conceives of the social constitution of reification, or to the interrelated constitution of its many different facets.

The same is the case for Vandenberghe's study of Adorno. He makes a strong claim for continuity between Lukács and Adorno, and holds that Lukács's theory of reification 'is the paradigmatic kernel of critical theory.' Critical theory, he claims, modifies this kernel in two ways: on the one hand, it 'abandons' Lukács's theory of

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<sup>67</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 147)

<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, it is difficult to understand what aspect of Lukács' s theory is being referred to with this term.

<sup>69</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 148)

‘class consciousness’; on the other, ‘it radicalizes the Weberian-Marxist theory of reification.’<sup>70</sup>

According to Vandenberghe, this radicalisation starts from the premises that ‘every aspect of Adorno’s sociology is so centred on reification that it becomes a virtually ontological category.’<sup>71</sup> Ironically, the same is true for Vandenberghe’s treatment of the different aspects of Adorno’s thought, which in Vandenberghe’s view are all part of Adorno’s theory of reification. Thus, Adorno’s criticism of reification in *Negative Dialectics* does not ‘imply’ that he ‘rejects the category of reification as such.’ Nor is it even a ‘rejection of Lukács’ category of reification.’<sup>72</sup> Instead, Adorno ‘simply strips Lukács’ s category of its humanist and optimistic connotations, inflecting it in a proto-structuralist direction that is closer to the older than the younger Marx, and more fatalist than revolutionary in its implications.’<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, since: (a) Vandenberghe’s prior discussions of Marx do little to distinguish between the young and old Marx, and (b) he doesn’t define what Adorno’s proto-structuralism consists of, we are left to guess why what seems like a discrepancy between Adorno and Lukács’ s conception of reification is not a rejection of it, or at least discontinuous with it.

Vandenberghe’s treatment of Adorno’s social theory as tantamount to his theory of reification can be seen in his discussion of the exchange principle. In Vandenberghe’s view the exchange principle’s ‘importance cannot be underestimated.’ This is because – in another curious misstep that seems to separate Lukács from Marxism, leaving Marxism untreated – it ‘enables both the articulation of the negative dialectics and Marxism and the conjunction of Lukács’ and Nietzsche’s categories of reification.’<sup>74</sup> But little consideration is given to how these forms are derived from exchange. Instead we get a characterisation of the Nietzschean strand of reification as being equivalent to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, while the Lukácsian strand is concerned with modern capitalist societies and the cash ‘nexus.’ In so doing, Vandenberghe furthers the claim of continuity between the conceptions of commodity fetishism put forward by Marx, Lukács and Adorno, together with that between Lukács and Adorno’s conceptions of reification.

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<sup>70</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 158)

<sup>71</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 191)

<sup>72</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 189)

<sup>73</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 189)

<sup>74</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009, 190)

As a consequence, Vandenberghe's philosophical history of German sociology can really be said to be a sociologist's account of German social philosophy. This is because Vandenberghe's definition of reification is so broad that: (a) there is no discussion of why distinct aspects of each thinker's social theory which they define as alienation or fetishism are interpreted as reification nor (b) any consideration of whether these distinct aspects of each writer's theory may vary with their conception of reification or with the other authors he covers. Furthermore there is no consideration of how each thinker conceives of these interpretations in tandem with the constitution of these social forms of domination; nor is there any focus on how each thinker understands the ways in which the different aspects of their theories relate to each other. Finally, there is no discussion of how the conceptual bases of reification differ in each respective thinker. As a result, rather than a comparative history that accounts for these elements in regard to the concept of fetishism as a theory of the constitution and of the constituent properties of social domination, Vandenberghe's 'philosophical' history merely summarises each specific thinker's social theory under the thematic of reification.

## **2.2 Conceptual Discontinuity**

In contrast to accounts of fetishism that stress continuity there are also a number of studies that stress discontinuity. By 'discontinuity' I mean that these studies stress important conceptual differences between the thinkers' conceptions of fetishism. In the majority of these accounts, Lukács, Adorno and other theorists are characterised as presenting inferior accounts to Marx's theory that are discontinuous with the latter. This can be seen in the account of fetishism as 'false consciousness' that can be found in the work of Joe McCarney;<sup>75</sup> it can also be seen in the Althusserian accounts of fetishism developed by Althusser and Balibar,<sup>76</sup> and in the type of fetishism as 'alienation' in Lucio Colletti's criticism of Lukács and Hegelian Marxism.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, a great many of these accounts of discontinuity can be found

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<sup>75</sup> See (McCarney 1980a)

<sup>76</sup> See (Althusser 2005), (Althusser and Balibar 2009) and (Balibar 2007)

<sup>77</sup> See (Colletti 1973, 1989) For another account of discontinuities see (Frisby 1992) and (Geras 1971)

in the value-form interpretations of fetishism.<sup>78</sup> While these discontinuous accounts often provide pertinent insight into the differences between thinkers, they often do so to the detriment of considering how aspects of each thinker's interpretation of fetishism might prove complementary, which I will draw out in my conclusion. Furthermore, these accounts of discontinuity lack a detailed comparative account that focuses on fetishism and social domination. The closest there is to the later is Gillian Rose's comparative study of reification, which I will now show that it has the virtue of pointing out important differences and deficiencies in theories of reification, but nevertheless it involves a problematic analysis of fetishism.

This is because Gillian Rose's influential treatment of reification in Marx, Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno is symptomatic of fetishism as 'reification'.<sup>79</sup> However, in contrast to Vandenberghe, Rose's work is exceptional in three respects: (1) it emphasises the conceptual differences between Marx, Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno's theories; (2) it bases these conceptual differences on the different aspects of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism that Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno drew on; (3) it also points out some areas of weakness in how reification has been used by neo-Marxism.

Yet, Rose's work is also indicative of the type of fetishism as 'reification'. This is because Rose draws an unsatisfactory distinction between Marx's theory and those of Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno: she designates Marx's theory as 'commodity fetishism', and Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno's as 'reification.' On the one hand, this distinction is unsatisfactory because of Rose's weak contention that Marx did not have a theory of reification; a contention that rests on Marx having only used the word *verdinglichung* twice.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, it is also unsatisfactory because Rose gives no grounds for why she designates Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno's social theories of domination as theories of reification. The latter is actually in contradiction to her philological treatment of Marx, because Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno use the terms 'fetishism'

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Postone's criticism of Lukács and The Frankfurt School in (Postone 1996) See also (Reichelt 2007)

<sup>79</sup> (Rose 1979)

<sup>80</sup> This ignores: (a) the fact that Lukács uses several words other than *verdinglichung* to describe his theory of reification; and (b) that Marx uses phrases such as *veraslichung* and *dinglich* to describe the process of social constitution that results in fetishisation and reification, or indeed in what Ehrbar translates as the 'personification of things and reification of persons.'

and ‘reification’ for what Rose defines solely as reification.<sup>81</sup> This leads Rose to draw a problematic distinction between Marx’s theory of fetishism and Lukács and Adorno’s theories of reification which prevents her from analyzing the role of fetishism in Lukács and Adorno’s theories of social domination.

In addition, the grounds upon which Rose bases her distinction between Lukács and Adorno’s utilisation of Marx’s theory of fetishism are problematic. This is because she draws an erroneous distinction between Marx’s theory of the labour process and his theory of value; a distinction that leads her to argue that Lukács’ theory of reification is based on the former, and that Adorno’s is based on the latter. Yet, as I will show, Marx’s theory of value incorporates the labour process as well as the forms of value, such as exchange value and use-value.<sup>82</sup> This undermines the bases upon which Rose grounds her distinction.

Finally, Rose makes some prescient criticisms of the ways in which neo-Marxists have used the concept of reification to generalise Marx’s theory of value to social institutions and culture whilst omitting from their claims, accounts of surplus value, of the state or of power. Rose does not however apply these criticisms to Lukács and Adorno’s particular theories, although she does note that their theories fail to make the distinction between concrete and abstract labour<sup>83</sup>, and that they do not provide an account of surplus-value. This is true, as I will show; but it is not clear, simply on the basis of the identification of these omissions, as to how the inclusion of these categories would solve the problems in Lukács and Adorno’s theories.

Despite these problems, Rose’s work is highly influential and is used as the basis for defining or distinguishing Marx, Lukács and Adorno’s conception of fetishism as ‘reification’ in the work of prominent scholars such as Martin Jay and Deborah Cook.<sup>84</sup> It is also a sophisticated and compact study of reification that comes closest to my aims in this thesis. This is because, in contrast to Vandenberghe, Rose’s work provides a comparative examination of how each thinker’s different interpretation of

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<sup>81</sup> This distinction is especially egregious in Benjamin, who used the term ‘fetishism’ far more than he used the term ‘reification’.

<sup>82</sup> One of these points of disagreement will be that Lukács and Adorno use Marx’s theory of value not for an explanation of how value is socially constituted, but rather for social critique. The problem, *contra* Rose, is not their decision to omit the concept of surplus-value, but rather that their theories do not include a substitute concept that covers the role that surplus-value would otherwise play.

<sup>83</sup> This criticism is also put forward by (Postone 1996)

<sup>84</sup> See also recent examples in (Jarvis 1998), (Dahms 2011) and (Hall 2011)



commodity fetishism provides a basis for their theories of social domination. However, her ungrounded distinction between fetishism and reification, as well as the thinkers she focuses on, leaves ample room for a comparative study of fetishism as a theory of the construction and of the characteristics of social domination in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre.

### **3. Conclusion**

As the preceeding has shown, there is a large amount of literature on fetishism. I have offered an overview of this literature by placing it within a typology. These types differ in conceiving fetishism as constitutive of a type of domination, forms of mystification, or combinations of the two. They also differ over the matter of whether these conceptions entail continuity or discontinuity between Marx and Western Hegelian Marxists. Those who argue for continuity usually do so in comparative or historical analyses that stress continuity between their expansive thematic conceptions; those who stress discontinuity usually do so through a comparative analysis that finds the claims of the writers involved to be inferior to those of Marx.

What these accounts do not provide, however, is an accurate and in-depth explanation of how each respective thinker's conception of fetishism differs from each other, and of how these different conceptions of fetishism factor into their respective theories of the constitution and the constituents of social domination. In contrast, this thesis orients itself by focusing on fetishism as a distinct concept rather than treating it as a type of alienation, reification etc, and by providing a comparative account of how this distinct conception is conceived and deployed in theories of the composition and of the characteristics of social domination.

To that end the overall aim of my thesis is to provide this comparative account, considering the coherence of these respective theories of fetishism and social domination and the possibility of their contemporary relevance. Each of my chapters on Marx, Lukács Adorno and Lefebvre therefore differs with the accounts assayed above by focusing on: (1) how each particular thinker conceives of fetishism; (2) how these particular conceptions of fetishism fit into each particular thinker's theory of the constitution and the constituents of theories of social domination; (3) an evaluation of the problems with these theories' conception of fetishism and social domination. I proceed in chronological order starting by examining the role Marx's theory of

fetishism plays in the *Capital*. I then turn to examine how Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre interpret Marx's theory in order to formulate a theory of social domination inclusive of social entities that were not covered in Marx's analysis. I first look at how Lukács interprets fetishism in his theory of reification. Following this I examine the role fetishism plays in Adorno's social theory. I then examine how Lefebvre's interpretation of fetishism fits into his ongoing attempts to theorise how domination is socially embedded. I finish with a three-part conclusion that summarises and compares: (1) my analysis of each thinker (2) my criticisms of each thinker and (3) my consideration of the possible relevance of these theories for a contemporary Marxian critical theory of fetishism and social domination.

In Chapter One I focus on how Marx conceives of fetishism in the constitution and the constituents of his theory of social domination. Since Marx is also the foundation for typological accounts of fetishism, and of Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre's interpretation of fetishism, I begin by distinguishing Marx's theory of fetishism from his theory of alienation. I then examine how Marx conceives of fetishism and the role it plays in the composition and the characteristics of his theory of social domination.

I argue that Marx's conception of what I deem fetish-characteristic forms is central to his theory of value.<sup>85</sup> This theory conceives of value as a real or practical abstraction that is constituted by the social form of capitalist production. The term 'fetish-characteristic form' is used to describe the abstract and autonomous property of these forms. It is deployed in Marx's discussion of how the fetish-characteristic forms of commodities, money and capital invert, dominate and thereby compel individual actions through reified social relations and the personification of things; a discussion that culminates in Marx's analysis of fetishism's role in the constitution and the constituent of social domination in the Trinity Formula. I criticise Marx's theory by pointing out how its ambiguities, contradictions and unfinished status undermine its coherence. I also point out how *Capital's* analysis of capitalism at its ideal average raises the problem of relating its theory to empirically complex social reality.

In chapter two I turn to the role that Lukács' conception of fetishism plays in his theory of the social constitution and the constituents of the social domination of

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<sup>85</sup> Marx uses the terms fetish-character (*Fetischarakter*), fetish-form (*Fetischform and Fetischgestalt*) and fetish-characteristic form (*Fetischcharatig form*) in his analysis of this aspect of his theory of fetishism. For the sake of simplicity I render these as fetish-characteristic forms.

reified society. I argue that Lukács' utilises a double-faceted interpretation of fetishism to articulate these aspects of his theory of reification. As this interpretation of fetishism is premised on replacing Marx's account of the abstract and autonomous properties of capitalist labour with the idea of social objectification as such, I argue that the first component of this interpretation is a view according to which fetishism arises through a process of objectification that separates subject from object. This process is reflected in the second component of Lukács' interpretation, which is the contention that these objects are transformed into things that possess the fetishistic properties of false objectivity. This notion of fetishism fuses his Hegelian, Marxian, Simmelian and Weberian positions and allows him to articulate a theory of fetishism and social domination which I will refer to as the dominating mystification of his theory of reification. I criticise Lukács' theory of reification by arguing that; (a) his conflation of objectification and fetishism and (b) his method of social generalisation fail to articulate an account of how and why reification is indicative of pervasive social domination.

In Chapter Three I argue that Adorno's conception of fetishism and social domination can be distinguished into two phases. The first phase utilises commodity fetishism in conjunction with his concepts drawn from Lukács, Benjamin, Freud and Marx as a means of conducting micrological studies of domination within the field of mass culture. In the second phase, he uses the concept of fetishism to treat the abstraction of exchange as an autonomous objective abstraction and to conceive of the social constitution of objective and subjective forms of domination. These forms of domination are conceived as being constitutive of the exchange abstraction by interpreting elements of Hegel, Weber, Freud, Kant, and Heidegger's theory in conjunction with it. I close by criticising Adorno's theory for its insufficient account of the genesis of the exchange abstraction and for his insufficient account of how it is constitutive of society. These insufficiencies ultimately undermine his critical theory as a critical theory of society.

In Chapter Four I argue that Lefebvre conceives of fetishism as a 'concrete abstraction' that is generated by social praxis, but which is never entirely determinate of it. I further argue that this conception forms the basis for three phases in which Lefebvre attempts to theorise how social domination is socially embedded. I begin with an examination of Lefebvre's classical humanist conception of socially embedded domination in his *Critique of Everyday Life*, which utilises fetishism as the basis of his

proposed study of analogous forms of objective and subjective alienation in everyday life. In phase two I show that Lefebvre's revision of the critique of everyday life abandons this classic Marxist humanist model in favour of a study of objective 'terrorist' forms of domination that are modelled on his conception of concrete abstraction, and which are coupled with a fragmented conception of alienation that is no longer based on his classic Marxist-humanist notion of the total man. In phase three I show how Lefebvre's writings on cities and space transpose his theory of concrete abstraction to the urban form and the production of space while jettisoning the explanatory power of the concept of alienation. I close by criticising the unsystematic nature of Lefebvre's theory and his reliance on a simplistic dualistic opposition, which, as in Lukács and Adorno, leads Lefebvre to undermine his theory of social domination through omitting a coherent account of its constitution and constituents.

The conclusion of the thesis is composed of three parts. In the first part I substantiate the lineage of fetishism and social domination I have provided by drawing together and comparing my analysis of fetishism and social domination in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre. In part two I move to consider the relevance of these particular theories for a contemporary critical theory of fetishism and social domination that avoids the pitfalls of Honneth's and Postone's theories. I begin by drawing out my criticisms of each thinker and considering whether their respective theories provide a coherent and cohesive critical social theory of fetishism that articulates the constitution and constituents of social domination. I conclude that each of these theories ultimately fails to provide one. I argue that in order for a critical theory of society to have a more cohesive standpoint, the question of a complex account of the social genesis of these types of fetishism must be addressed. Failing to do so leaves critical theory reliant on an account of fetishism in which social relations are said to underlie but do not adequately ground pervasive forms of social forms of domination. I close in part three by considering how elements of these theories of Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre might be integrated into a contemporary critical theory that provides an account of the genesis and interrelation of aspects of each of these theories thus providing the potential basis for a contemporary Marxian critical theory of fetishism and social domination.

# **I. Marx, the Fetish-Characteristic Forms of Value and Social Domination**

## **Introduction**

In this chapter I focus on how Marx conceives fetishism and on the role that it plays in the constitution and the constituents of his theory of social domination. I close by evaluating the coherence of this theory. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, I examine how fetishism is used as a theory to articulate the collective constitution of social phenomena that possess autonomous and inverted properties that structure, compel and maim individuals. The term social domination is intended to convey that there is an integral link between the way a society is structured and these fetishistic types of domination that are held to be characteristic of this society. In my examination of Marx I focus on how this theory of fetishism is articulated in *Capital* and how it is indicative of a theory of social domination.

Since this chapter also provides the grounds for: (a) differentiating my focus on fetishism from the interpretations of fetishism that I covered in my literature review, and (b) my subsequent comparative study of Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre, my interpretation is necessarily accompanied by a lengthy exposition and clarification. In attempting to elucidate Marx's account I will distinguish (a) my own interpretation of the role that fetishism plays in Marx's account of social domination from the functions that it performs in other notions of fetishism *qua* domination, such as the fetishism as 'alienation' and the fetishism as 'reification' readings. Furthermore, these expository elements also aim (b) to provide a clear basis upon which the subsequent chapters of the thesis can establish the way in which Marx's own notion of fetishism and social domination differs from that advanced, under the rubric of fetishism, by Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre.

To these ends, the chapter will draw on and develop the analyses presented in existing studies of Marx's work that have interpreted his theory of fetishism in the

context of his monetary theory of value.<sup>86</sup> In doing so, I will argue that: (1) Marx's theory of fetishism integrates his form-analysis<sup>87</sup> with his account of reified social relations and the personification of things and that it thereby provides an account of the social constitution of the forms of value. This will constitute one of the most important arguments in the present chapter. My contention here is that the fetish is not only intimately wedded to the forms of value, but that it also pertains directly to their constitution, i.e. to their production and reproduction within society. Consequently, I will show that it directly informs the inversion of subjects and objects entailed by the operation of the form of value within capitalist society. I will thus aim to demonstrate that Marx's account of fetishism is not simply an account of reification or alienation but rather a sophisticated theory of impersonal social domination.

In addition, and by extension, I will argue (2) that Marx's concept of what I term 'fetish-characteristic forms'<sup>88</sup> describes the autonomous and personified constituent properties of these forms of value: forms that invert and thereby dominate and compel individuals' actions. In other words, I will show that the fetish is not the exclusive preserve of the commodity. Instead, I will argue that the numerous forms of value described within Marx's account are themselves possessed of fetishistic characteristics and that this is due to the manner in which they function as aspects of a sovereign and entirely dominant economic system.

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<sup>86</sup> These interpretations by I.I. Rubin, H.G. Backhaus, Helmut Reichelt, Werner Bonefeld, Chris Arthur and Michael Heinrich form an aspect of the value-form interpretation of fetishism. As discussed in my literature review, this interpretation: (1) examines fetishism as an aspect of Marx's monetary theory of value, and (2) conceives of Marx's theory of value as explication of the genesis and *sui generis* properties of capitalist social domination. However, these authors' analysis of fetishism is usually focused on the commodity. Thus by drawing on it I indicate that I extend the orientation and analysis of this interpretation to Marx's analysis of the fetish-characteristic forms of money and the Trinity Formula.

<sup>87</sup> The term form-analysis is used to refer to Marx's analysis of the forms of value in part one of *Capital*. It is also used to emphasise that Marx's analysis focuses on these forms prior to his analysis of the particular social relations that constitute them.

<sup>88</sup> This term draws on the distinction that authors such as (Bellofiore 2011; Bellofiore 2012), (Ehrbar 2009), (Clegg 2008), (Arthur 2013), (Schulz 2013) and (Gray 2013) show Marx to make between fetish-character and fetishism. As they demonstrate, the former refers to the socially specific properties of Marx's theory of value, while the latter refers to political economists' trans-historical hypostatisation of these socially specific properties. The term 'fetish-characteristic form' is drawn from Marx's various designations of the fetish-characteristic properties of the forms of value such as *Fetischcharakter*, *Fetischform*, *Fetischgestalt* and *Fetischcharatigform*. I use fetish-characteristic forms to designate these properties for the sake of clarity.

Consequently, I will argue (3) that Marx's account of these fetish-characteristic forms, and indeed of their socially constituent and as a result dominating properties, proceeds – within the pages of *Capital* – from the commodity, through money and capital (where these forms become more autonomous at the same time as their dominating properties become more concrete and socially embedded), and ultimately culminates in Marx's account of The Trinity Formula. The Trinity Formula provides an account of the constitution, of the constituents and of reproduction of the 'enchanted, perverted topsy-turvy world'<sup>89</sup> of capital and therefore the terminus in how Marx's theory of fetishism articulates his theory of social domination.<sup>90</sup>

One of the first steps that I will make towards demonstrating these claims is to distinguish Marx's theory of social domination from his account of alienation. To that end, I begin in this chapter by placing Marx's early conception of social domination in relation to the positions developed in his late work. Having done so I then move to examine how Marx employs fetishism as an aspect of his theory of the constitution and the constituents of social domination. I begin by defining how Marx understood the object and method of both *Capital* and of his theory of value, and I then outline how his monetary theory of value conceived capitalism as an historically and socially specific (a) class-based form of labour allocation, and (b) as a collectively constituted form of social domination. I demonstrate the former by presenting an overview of the general formula of capital. In order to substantiate the latter, I turn to fetishism, and thereby to the three primary arguments of this chapter (as set out above). The chapter closes with some criticisms of Marx's theory. I point out that its endemic ambiguities, contradictions and its unfinished state undermine its coherence. I also argue that Marx's technique in *Capital* of engaging with capitalism through the study of *ideal averages* invites problems as regards the difficulty of relating its theory to the complexity of empirical social reality.

## **I. The Young Marx and Social Domination**

Helmut Reichelt, H.G. Backhaus and Lucio Colletti point out that Marx's mature work has a degree of continuity with his earlier conception of social

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<sup>89</sup> (Marx 1993a)

<sup>90</sup> As I will demonstrate in the ensuing chapters, Marx's technique of applying fetishism to social domination differs from Lukács's, Adorno's and Lefebvre's.

domination. Yet, as they also point out, the theory of value in his later work represents what Colletti calls the ‘ever-deepening grasp of a single problematic’, in which ‘the limitations of the early texts are constituted [...] by the decisive importance of Marx’s own later advances in his mature economic writings.’<sup>91</sup> In this section, I highlight these similarities and differences between Marx’s early and later positions in order to distinguish his theory of fetishism from his theory of alienation.

Since much of the literature on fetishism was written within the context of the debate between humanist and Althusserian Marxists my discussion is led to engage with both sides of this debate. On the one hand, I argue against the Althusserian notion of an ‘epistemological break’; on the other, I also argue against the classic Marxist humanist notion that the theory of fetishism amounts to what Lefebvre refers to as the ‘economic form of alienation.’<sup>92</sup> In contrast, I argue that contrary to popular interpretations and assumptions, many of the structural concepts of Marx’s theory of social domination involved in his critique of political economy were formulated *prior* to his development of a theory of alienation in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. In addition, I also argue that the theory of alienation that Marx puts forward in *The Manuscripts* represents the first time that the conceptual structure of his theory of domination is conceived in terms of a mode of social production.

Consequently, my discussion will show that the theory of fetishism does indeed constitute a continuation of Marx’s early work, but that this continuation only refines some aspects of the theory of alienation propounded in *The Manuscripts*.

### **1.1 The Conceptual Structure of Marx’s Theory of Domination**

As Reichelt shows, what he terms the ‘construction’ of Marx’s theory of social reality serves as ‘the organizing skeleton’ that runs throughout Marx’s works, albeit ‘dressed in various costumes.’<sup>93</sup> This ‘construction’ consists in several key aspects that form the structure of Marx’s theory of social domination. The steps are as follows: (1) Marx conceives social reality as constitutive of forms that are created by a process of social constitution; (2) this process of social constitution consists in a dynamic and

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<sup>91</sup> Colletti in (Marx and Marx 1975, 47)

<sup>92</sup> (Henri Lefebvre 2008a)

<sup>93</sup> (Reichelt 2005, 57) and (Reichelt 2000) See also numerous articles by Werner Bonefeld such as (Bonefeld 2001a)



contradictory process in which essence must appear and hide itself in appearance; (3) these forms of social reality are constitutive of a sensuous-supersensuous and inverted world in which people are dominated by the abstractions they collectively constitute.

In Reichelt's view these aspects of Marx's conceptual structure of domination are evident as far back as his doctoral thesis and become fleshed out prior to the *Manuscripts* in the period in which Marx's theory of social reality was influenced by Ludwig Feuerbach. As Backhaus points out, Feuerbach's influence on Marx can be seen in three ways: Marx thinks (1) that social inversion can be grasped because essence can be conceived independently from its forms of appearance; (2) the conception of essence as a process of human constitution that appears in 'alienated' and contradictory forms; and (3) his critical-genetic method as the derivation of these estranged and contradictory forms of appearance from human social constitution.<sup>94</sup> I will refer to these elements of Marx's account, outlined by Reichelt and Backhaus, as the conceptual structure of Marx's theory of social domination. For the time being I refrain from providing a general definition of the content of these concepts of 'appearance' and 'inversion' due to the different forms they take in Marx's account of the state, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and in *Capital*. The ensuing analysis demonstrates how the content of this conceptual structure shifts.

These elements can be seen as a whole in *The Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*,<sup>95</sup> where Marx conceives of the bourgeois state as an abstract form of what 'amounts to an autonomisation and inversion of human social practice.'<sup>96</sup> By the time that he wrote this text, Marx had already developed his structural conception of social domination and he had applied it to a theory that cast the social constitution of the state as a form of social domination.<sup>97</sup> This is why Colletti rightly states that *The Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* can be seen as the embryo of the concept of fetishism that Marx presented in *Capital*. However, it is not until *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* that the conceptual structure of Marx's account of domination is applied to political economy, albeit in the context of a theory of alienation.

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<sup>94</sup> (Backhaus 2005)

<sup>95</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

<sup>96</sup> (Reichelt 2005, 57)

<sup>97</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

## 1.2 Social Domination in the Theory of Alienation

One of the important consequences of Marx's conceiving of political economy as constitutive of social domination is that it leads him to grant primacy to productive activity. Chris Arthur points out that the conception of productive activity that Marx develops in *The Manuscripts* is more complex than is generally appreciated.<sup>98</sup> This is due to an important distinction that Marx makes between the ontology of productive activity and the socially specific form that this activity takes in 'labour.' For Marx, productive activity consists in the process of objectification that occurs in the course of the interaction between human beings and the natural world.<sup>99</sup> This conception of ontology thus grants a central role to human relations with things, and conceives of society as constitutive of relations between people and things. 'Labour' thus consists in the socially specific way in which productive activity is conducted in capitalist society.

<sup>100</sup>

At this point in his development, Marx's explication of the genesis of these forms is marked by his Hegelian conception of abstract labour, his Smithian conception of capital, and the absence of a monetary theory of value.<sup>101</sup> However, Marx still conceives of this socially specific activity – 'labour' – as constituting the political economic forms of private property. These innovations are crucial for how Marx conceives of 'labour' as constitutive of a mode of social domination in which the forms of political economy are analysed as external and alien things: as forms that function as autonomous, inverted mechanisms of domination that operate through aggregating social labour along class-antagonistic lines. The emergence of these innovations can be seen in Marx's theory of alienation, where this nascent theory of domination is still wedded to Marx's idea of human nature and human estrangement.

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<sup>98</sup> (Arthur 1986)

<sup>99</sup> I will show in the next chapter that this conception of objectification differs from the Hegelian and Simmelian idea of objectification that is integral to Lukács's theory of reification.

<sup>100</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this distinction see (Arthur 1986) This conceptual distinction between social activity and labour will also be utilised in *Capital* in the distinction Marx makes between the trans-historical activity of labour and the specific social character of capitalist labour.

<sup>101</sup> See (Chitty 1998)

The distinction that Marx makes between alienation and estrangement in his theory of alienation is often missed by commentators.<sup>102</sup> This distinction is however important because it shows that Marx defines alienation in terms of the constitution of social domination through alienated labour and estrangement as the dehumanised state that humans are reduced to insofar as this alienated form of social constitution estranges them from their human essence.<sup>103</sup>

Alienated labour is thus the result of the socially specific activity of 'labour'. It consists of workers creating and alienating the products they produce to owners in exchange for wages. This alienates the workers' product which, as alienated labour, 'now stands opposed to it [the worker] as an *alien being*, as a *power independent* of the producer.'<sup>104</sup>

This alien power consists in the autonomous forms of political economy. For Marx 'private property is [...] the product, result, and necessary consequence, of *alienated labour*.'<sup>105</sup> Private property thus functions as 'the means'<sup>106</sup> through 'which labour alienates itself' as 'the *realization of this alienation*.'<sup>107</sup> This process is therefore constitutive of social reproduction (i.e. that reproduction in which '[t]he labourer produces capital and capital produces him, which means that he produces himself; man as a labourer, as a commodity, is the product of this entire cycle'<sup>108</sup>) and it forms a dynamic in which 'the *devaluation* of the human world increases in direct relation to

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<sup>102</sup> This distinction is often neglected because the two separate words that Marx uses – *Entäusserung* and *Entfremdung* – are usually both translated as either alienation or estrangement. Chris Arthur convincingly argues that they are distinct. He translates *Entäusserung* as alienation and *Entfremdung* as estrangement. See the appendix in (Arthur 1986)

<sup>103</sup> This conflation is particularly true of commentary that amalgamates fetishism with alienation. These types of commentary often describe fetishism as part of Marx's theory of alienation or estrangement with little discussion of why they have chosen either term, or if they see any relation between alienation and estrangement.

<sup>104</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

<sup>105</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

<sup>106</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

<sup>107</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

<sup>108</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

the *increase in the value* of the world of things'.<sup>109</sup> This causes alienated labour to become an autonomous, alien and inverted form of social domination:

The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, assumes an *external* existence, but that it exists independently, *outside himself*, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force.<sup>110</sup>

Alienated labour is also constitutive of three types of dehumanisation in which humanity is estranged from its essence. These types of dehumanisation rely on the mirror-image of human nature as 'species-being' that Marx develops in *The Manuscripts*.<sup>111</sup> These types of estrangement are 'consequences' that 'follow from the fact that the worker is related to the *product of his labour* as to an *alien* object.'<sup>112</sup> The first two types of estrangement thus occur in the condition of alienated labour, where the workers become estranged from their own species-activity of production and from their product.<sup>113</sup> These two primary forms however lead to two broader types of estrangement: for since workers are alienated from their own activity, they become estranged from their own essence; and as a result, humanity is estranged from its own nature.

As I have shown, *The Manuscripts* contain a number of rich and intriguing comments that represent Marx's first insights into social production and political economy. In these comments, Marx translates the elements of his structural conception of social domination from the political form of the state into forms of political economy. Private property is thus interpreted as the form in which the

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<sup>109</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

<sup>110</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

<sup>111</sup> The term mirror-image is taken from (Reichelt 2005) who includes it as another element of Marx's theory of social reality. For perspectives that offer more in-depth investigations of species-being and which argue for it as a normative ground, see (Dyer-Witheford 2004) and (Chitty 1993 and 1997)

<sup>112</sup> (Marx and Marx 1975)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

<sup>113</sup> This is what Marx terms self-estrangement. As Marx notes 'Here we have self-estrangement' whereas in alienated labour 'we had the estrangement of the *thing*.' (Marx and Marx 1975)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

essence of alienated labour appears as an external, alien, autonomous and inverted form of domination. This aspect of Marx's theory of alienation is developed in Marx's critique of political economy. Yet there are two important points of difference that the critique of political economy has with *The Manuscripts*. In the first place, there is little evidence that Marx held onto the anthropological elements of his theory of alienation as the basis for this theory of the constitutive elements of social domination.<sup>114</sup> Secondly, *Capital* provides a more sophisticated explanation for the constitution and the constituents of capital as a form of social domination than is provided by *The Manuscripts*.

## 2. The Critique of Political Economy

Before proceeding to an analysis of Marx's conception of fetishism and its role in this theory of the composition and characteristics of social domination it is necessary to show how fetishism fits into Marx's analysis in *Capital*. In order to do so it is important to outline what *Capital* is, and to state how Marx conceives of capital itself. To see this in more detail, we need to understand how Marx characterised: (1) the object of his analysis in *Capital*; (2) the method of *Capital*; and (3) his theory of value.

### 2.1 The Object of *Capital*

The object of Marx's analysis in *Capital* relies on the notion of scientific abstraction that can be found in a few stray comments throughout that work. This can be seen in Marx's comment that *Capital's* analyses rely on 'the power of abstraction.'<sup>115</sup> In this case, Marx's use of abstraction refers to the abstract, 'ideal' model of capital; hence Marx's comment in volume Three that he is 'only out to present the internal

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<sup>114</sup> This is not to say that Marx refrained from describing social domination with similar constituent elements. There are many passages in his mature writings that focus on how capitalist labour deforms people; there are also passages that discuss the importance of indifference between people. However, these passages are not based on an explicit theory of human nature, nor are they portrayed as estranged human essence.

<sup>115</sup> (Marx 2004, xviii)

organization of the capitalist mode of production' in 'its ideal average, as it were.'<sup>116</sup> The way in which this ideal average relates to Marx's empirical examples can be seen in the introduction to *Capital I*. There Marx states that he uses England as a 'main illustration of the theoretical developments' of this 'ideal', and that in doing so he aims to demonstrate how the 'natural laws of capitalist production' operate in their 'iron necessity.'<sup>117</sup> The object of Marx's analysis is therefore an ideal model of capital.<sup>118</sup>

## 2.2 The method of *Capital*

The method of Marx's analysis pertains to the distinction that he makes between his method and his presentation.<sup>119</sup> The former is the scientific formulation of his critical genetic method in which he demonstrates how essence appears and hides itself in appearance. This is reflected in his definition of science *vis-à-vis* social reality ('all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided')<sup>120</sup> and in his scientific analysis of capital: 'where science comes in is to show *how* the law of value asserts itself.'<sup>121</sup> These strands are tied together in Marx's analysis in *Capital* by his double-faceted critique of political economy. On one level, this critique unites essences and appearances by 'exposing' how the law of value asserts itself as a socially constituted and constitutive form of social domination. On another level, it criticises the discipline of political economy, in which 'the fetishism peculiar to bourgeois political economy [...] metamorphoses the social, economic character impressed on things in the process of social production into a natural character stemming from the material nature of those things.'<sup>122</sup>

Marx's method of presentation concerns how he presents this critique of 'the internal organization' of capital at its 'ideal average.' This notion of presentation is

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<sup>116</sup> (Marx 1993, 970)

<sup>117</sup> (Marx 1992, 970)

<sup>118</sup> This point was first made by Michael Heinrich. See (Heinrich 1999 and Heinrich 2012).

<sup>119</sup> The issue of Marx's method has of course received much attention and is still a matter of debate, much of which is not germane to the topic of this thesis. However, the distinction Marx makes between method and presentation is relevant. For a further discussion of this issue see (Schmidt, Arthur)

<sup>120</sup> (Marx 1992, 970)

<sup>121</sup> (Marx 1988)

[http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68\\_07\\_11.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68_07_11.htm)

<sup>122</sup> (Marx 1993a) <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1885-c2/ch11.htm>

based on another sense of abstraction. Marx's analysis of capitalism is presented at different levels of abstraction in *Capital*. There is some inconsistency, but on the whole, *Capital* moves from the level of the form-analysis of the commodity through to more concrete levels of abstraction. This movement proceeds in what can be termed a genetic 'dialectical' fashion, in which the different categories presented at different levels of abstraction are shown to logically derive and internally relate to each other.<sup>123</sup> However – and this point should be stressed – this dialectical method of presentation does not mean that Marx's method itself can simply be characterised as 'dialectical.' As Marx puts it:

[I]t is one thing for a critique to take a science to the point at which it admits of a dialectical presentation, and quite another to apply an abstract, ready-made system of logic to vague presentiments of just such a system.<sup>124</sup>

The method of Marx's analysis in *Capital* therefore unites his critical-genetic account of the constitution and constituents of social domination with his presentation of this analysis at different levels of abstraction.

### 2.3 Marx's Theory of Value

The object and the method of analysis of capital are applied in his theory of value. Marx is often read as advocating a neo-Ricardian and 'substantialist' conception of value, and on this reading Marx amends Ricardo's theory by showing that exploitation is a necessary part of the process of production of capital. However, as Marx stated in several places, he considered his analysis of the value-form to be one of his most important contributions.<sup>125</sup> Marx's analysis in fact provides a monetary theory

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<sup>123</sup> This can be seen in comments Marx makes reflecting on his method in *Notes on Wagner* 73-75 of Hans G. Ehrbar's translation. Some people also draw on Marx's discussion of the method of his presentation in the preface to *The Grundrisse* to account for the method of presentation in *Capital*. However, there is some variation between the two. For instance the presentation in *Capital* does not consistently proceed from the abstract to the concrete. This is discussed to some extent below. For a more detailed discussion see (Heinrich 2012)

<sup>124</sup> (Marx and Engels 1984, 261) As I will show in the course of this thesis this emphasises an important difference between Marx's method and Lukács's, Adorno's and Lefebvre's 'dialectical' interpretations of Marx's method.

<sup>125</sup> See Marx's statement that 'Political economy has indeed analyzed value and its magnitude, however incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within

of value that is different from the neo-Ricardian interpretation of Marx, and which conceives value as the historically specific social character of capitalist labour.<sup>126</sup> Marx's monetary theory of value is concerned with how the social character of capitalist production is constituted by social relations, and with how these social relations function through the medium of money to distribute labour. Marx makes this clear in his letter to Kugelmann;

It is self-evident that this necessity of the distribution of social labour in specific proportions is certainly not abolished by the specific form of social production; it can only change its form of manifestation. Natural laws cannot be abolished at all. The only thing that can change, under historically differing conditions, is the form in which those laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labour asserts itself in a state of society in which the interconnection of social labour expresses itself as the private exchange of the individual products of labour, is precisely the exchange-value of these products.<sup>127</sup>

As I will show, this concept of value, and the socially specific importance of exchange that it entails, is reflected in two aspects of Marx's theory of capitalism: the means by which labour is distributed in capitalism through the socially specific mechanism of exchange and the class relation; and the way in which the allocation of labour through exchange lead to the social constitution and constituents of a socially unique form of domination in which the jointly composed autonomous forms of value invert and thereby coerce and rule individuals.

This can be seen firstly by applying the structural conception of Marx's theory of social domination - first discussed above in reference to Marx's early works - to his theory of value. By doing so, I will demonstrate that Marx

- (1) Uses his critical-genetic method to account for the social constitution of capital by deriving it from the dynamic and contradictory process in which social labour appears and hides itself in the socially specific forms of value.

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these forms. But he has never once asked the question why this content has assumed that particular form.' (Marx 2004, 174)

<sup>126</sup> As discussed in the conclusion below there are vestiges of a neo-Ricardian theory of value in Marx's work that undermine the coherence of his monetary theory of value.

<sup>127</sup> (Marx 1968)

[http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68\\_07\\_11.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68_07_11.htm)



- (2) Conceives of capital as constitutive of sensible-supersensible alienated and inverted forms of abstract domination that are collectively constituted and reproduced by the socially specific type of social labour that appears in these forms of value.

Although these two issues are clearly interrelated and are presented together by Marx, I will separate them here for the sake of clarity. I will outline the former whilst presenting an account of how commodities, money, capital and the class relation function to allocate labour through the impersonal money form; I will then show how the two issues relate to the allocation of labour in Marx's theory of fetishism which accounts for the constitution and constituent dominating properties of this historically specific social form. I end by showing how they are drawn together in his account of the Trinity Formula.

### 3. *Capital*

As I have noted, Marx's analysis of capital proceeds from the abstract to the concrete. What I have not yet mentioned, however, is that it does so in a complex manner. Marx would later present a helpful résumé of the structure of this presentation in his *Notes on Wagner*, in which he also demonstrates the link between the form-analysis undertaken in the first part of *Capital* with the rest of the latter work:

In my analysis of the commodity I do not come to a halt with its dual way of presenting itself, but immediately proceed to show that in this duality of the commodity there presents itself the dual *character* of the *labour* whose product it is: of *useful* labour, i.e. the concrete modes of the labours which create use-values, and of abstract *labour*, of *labour as expenditure of labour power*, regardless of the 'useful' way in which it is expended (on which the presentation of the production process later depends); that in the development of the *value form of the commodity*, in the final instance its money form, and thus of *money*, the *value* of a commodity presents itself in the *use-value* of the other commodity, i.e. in its natural form; that *surplus-value* itself is derived from a 'specific' *use-value of labour power* belonging to it exclusively<sup>128</sup>

In what follows below I outline the relevant aspects of this trajectory, beginning with the form-analysis of simple circulation and then moving to the general formula for

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<sup>128</sup> (Marx 1996) <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/01/wagner.htm>

*Capital*, to surplus value and to the class-relation. This form-analysis accounts for the forms of value – commodities and money – within which capitalist social labour necessarily appears as a result of atomised production for exchange.

### 3.1 The Form-Analysis

The form-analysis begins with the commodity and unfolds in a complex manner. Marx moves from defining the commodity as consisting of use-value and exchange-value to arguing that exchange-value consists of the form of appearance of a ‘third thing’ that commodities have in common when they are brought into relation with each other. Different commodities have this ‘third thing’ in common when their use-values, and thus the particular, concrete type of labour necessary for their production, are abstracted away.<sup>129</sup> What remains is abstract labour, which is the substance of what Marx defines as value. Abstract labour is not generated by concrete production nor is this abstraction carried out conceptually prior to the act of exchange. Rather, it is an abstraction that stems from atomised production and is realised in exchange.<sup>130</sup> This abstraction is therefore generated ‘behind the backs of individuals’<sup>131</sup> who

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<sup>129</sup> This is made clearer in the French edition of *Capital* where Marx added the following sentence: ‘it is evident that one abstracts from the use-value of the commodities when one exchanges them and that every exchange relation is itself characterized by this abstraction’ Quoted in (Ehrbar 2009. 439)

<sup>130</sup> This is made clear in the following: ‘If we say that, as values, commodities are merely congealed masses of human labour, our analysis reduces them to the abstraction ‘value’ but does not give them a form of value distinct from their bodily forms. It is otherwise in the value relation of one commodity to another. The first commodity’s value-character steps here forward through its own relationship with the second commodity. By setting the coat, for example, as a thing of value equal to the linen, the commodity owners also set the labour embedded in the coat equal to the labour embedded in the linen [...] by equating tailoring with weaving, the commodity owners reduce tailoring in fact to what is really equal in the two kinds of labour, that they are both human labour. Through this detour over tailoring they say that weaving too, in so far as it weaves value, has nothing to distinguish it from tailoring, and, consequently, is abstract human labour. Only the expression of different sorts of equivalents makes the specific character of value creating labour apparent, by in fact reducing the different kinds of commodities to their common quality of being human labour in general.’ (Marx 2009, 132)

<sup>131</sup> ‘The different proportions, in which different sorts of labour are reduced to simple labour as their *standard*, are established by a social process that goes on behind the back of the producers and, consequently, seems to be fixed by custom. In the *values* coat and linen, abstraction is made from the difference of their *use-values*; now we have

participate in exchange,<sup>132</sup> and appears in the exchange-value of commodities in the form of the value-relation between them, where the ‘common substance that manifests itself in the exchange-relation [and thus in the] exchange-value of commodities is their value.’<sup>133</sup>

The magnitude of value – which derives from socially necessary labour time – is also determined in exchange. Commodities are only ‘realised’ as bearers of value if they are successfully exchanged on the market. For this to occur, the time it took a specific commodity to be produced is not compared with another specific commodity. Rather, the specific commodity is compared to the total abstract labour of society. In this comparison, socially necessary labour time establishes whether or not the commodity will be exchanged. If the commodity is exchanged, value is realised in it in the form of exchange-value. If the commodity is not exchanged then it is deemed not to possess value. Since this process goes on behind the backs of individuals it is contingent on whether or not commodities are exchanged. There is no assurance that commodities will be exchanged and realised as values in exchange.

Marx points out that people are already aware that commodities operate within this value-relation in the value-form of money. But Marx moves to logically

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seen that also in the *labour* that represents itself in these values, abstraction is made from the difference of its useful forms of *tailoring* and *weaving*.’ (Marx 2009, 134-5)

<sup>132</sup> Marx uses some unfortunate physiological metaphors when describing abstract labour in later editions of *Capital*. But the majority of his other descriptions counter these clunky metaphors. These descriptions show that abstract labour is not a substance that is produced by the burning of calories, nor is it a purposive mental operation. As Marx states later, ‘not an atom of matter’ enters into this process of abstraction in which ‘value is realized only in exchange, i.e. in a social process.’ (Marx 2009, 105) Later, while discussing the three peculiarities of the equivalent form, Marx further clarifies the specific social character of these categories by stating that the ‘objective character as values is purely social and that this objective character only appears in ‘the social relation between commodity and commodity.’ (Marx 2009, 110) Finally, in the French edition, Marx unequivocally states that ‘[t]he reduction of various concrete private acts of labour to this abstraction of equal human labour is only carried out through exchange, which in fact equates products of different acts of labour with each other.’ These elements of abstract labour are also mirrored in Marx’s discussion of how capitalist labour ‘achieves practical truth as an abstraction’ in *The Grundrisse* (Marx, 1973) For a more in-depth treatment of the controversy see (Bonefeld 2010) For in-depth discussions see (Rubin 2007) and (Arthur forthcoming)

<sup>133</sup> Marx clarifies what he means by substance in *Notes on Wagner*: ‘nowhere do I speak of the common social substance of exchange-value. I rather say that the exchange-values (exchange-value without at least two of them, does not exist) represent something common to them, which is ‘quite independent of their use-values [i.e. their natural form], namely value.’ (Marx 1996, 18)

derive the money-form from this specific character of atomised social production for exchange; 'a task never attempted by bourgeois economists.'<sup>134</sup>

The logical derivation starts with the simple form of value. Marx states that the secret of all forms of value 'lies' in this simple form. The 'secret' that Marx describes here is the necessary asymmetrical relationship in the value relation. In this relation one commodity necessarily serves as the equivalent form of value. The other commodity serves as the relative form of value. This means that the relative form expresses its value in the equivalent form. As a consequence, the value of the relative form is 'expressed' in the 'natural' body of the equivalent form. Thus the relative form acquires a value form different from its bodily form. The equivalent form thus 'becomes a thing in which value is manifested, or which represents value in its tangible form.'<sup>135</sup> This entails that 'the first commodity plays an active role; the second a passive one.' The equivalent form therefore possesses an exclusive and asymmetrical power over the relative form: it exclusively 'embodies' value because the relative form must successfully equate itself with the equivalent form in order to be exchanged. The equivalent form is consequently 'the form of being directly exchangeable with other commodities' and expresses 'the magnitude of commodities in the relative form.'

This asymmetrical power of the equivalent form establishes its three peculiarities. Because the equivalent form embodies the value of other commodities its value becomes a use-value. The 'natural form' of the commodity thus becomes the form of value.<sup>136</sup> This is what Marx calls the first peculiarity of the equivalent form. The natural form of the equivalent form thus 'represents a supra-natural property: their value, which is something purely social.'<sup>137</sup> At the same time, the equivalent form, 'just

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<sup>134</sup> Here we see one of the points in which Marx's theory of value distinguishes itself from Ricardian theories of value.

<sup>135</sup> (Marx 2009, 143)

<sup>136</sup> The first peculiarity which strikes us when we consider the equivalent form is that the use-value becomes the form of appearance of its opposite, value. The natural form of the commodity becomes the form of value. But, note well, this reversal happens for the commodity b (coat, or maize, iron, etc.) only if some arbitrary other commodity A (linen etc.) enters into a value relation with it, and this reversal holds only within this relation. Since a commodity cannot relate to itself as equivalent and therefore it cannot make its own physical skin into the expression of its value, it must relate to another commodity as equivalent, and therefore must make the physical skin of another commodity into its own value form. (Marx 2009, 148)

<sup>137</sup> (Marx 2009, 149)

as in everyday life, expresses value, as if its value form were given by nature.’<sup>138</sup> The first peculiarity of the equivalent form leads to the second peculiarity of the equivalent form: ‘concrete labour becomes the form of manifestation of its opposite, abstract human labour.’<sup>139</sup> This means that an inversion occurs whereby the product of concrete labour that produced the equivalent form ‘becomes the expression of abstract human labour.’<sup>140</sup> In Marx’s view, there is ‘nothing mysterious’ about the fact that a coat and linen ‘possess’ labour. But ‘in the value expression of the commodity the matter is stood on its head.’ The second peculiarity of the equivalent form leads to its third peculiarity: for ‘private labour becomes the form of its opposite, namely labour in its immediately social form.’<sup>141</sup>

At this point Marx expands his analysis from the simple picture that he has given of the equivalent and relative form to the money form. In his ensuing analysis, Marx argues that the money form – or what Marx also terms the general equivalent – is thus a logical necessity that is generated by the acts of atomised commodity exchange and that it enables exchange *per se*.

It thus becomes evident that because the objectivity of commodities as values is the purely ‘social existence of these things’, it can only be expressed through an all-sided social relation consequently the form of their values must be a socially valid form.<sup>142</sup>

This makes the ‘bodily form’ of the general equivalent ‘count as the visible incarnation, the general social chrysalis state, of all human labour.’<sup>143</sup> This ‘bodily form’ thus represents abstract labour ‘positively’ by equating itself with all other forms of labour, and by reducing ‘all kinds of actual labour to their common character of being labour in general.’<sup>144</sup> For Marx, this shows that capitalist social production necessarily leads to the generation of a socially valid, general equivalent money form; a form that would serve as the socially valid expression of value:

The General form of value, in which all products of labour are presented as mere congealed quantities of undifferentiated human labour, shows by this general coverage

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<sup>138</sup> (Marx 2009, 149)

<sup>139</sup> (Marx 2009, 150)

<sup>140</sup> (Marx 2009, 150)

<sup>141</sup> (Marx, 2009, 150)

<sup>142</sup> (Marx 2009, 158)

<sup>143</sup> (Marx 2009, 159)

<sup>144</sup> (Marx 2009, 159)

alone that is the social expression of the world of commodities. Thus it makes it plain that within this world the general human character of labour forms its specific social character.<sup>145</sup>

In Marx's view, any commodity can play the role of the general equivalent. But it is not until the general equivalent has been established as a particular commodity that it gains 'objective fixity and general social validity.'<sup>146</sup> Once this is established, 'the natural form' of the commodity playing the role of the equivalent 'grow(s) together' with its equivalent function.<sup>147</sup> The equivalent thus 'becomes the money commodity' and assumes the money function: 'Playing the part of General equivalent within the world of commodities becomes its specific social function and consequently its social monopoly.'<sup>148</sup> As a consequence, atomised social production for exchange is realised in the value relationship between commodities and money.

### **3.2 The General Formula of Capital, Surplus Value and the Class Relation**

These forms of value compose the general formula of capital, which is a process that consists in a movement between money, commodities and more money (M-C-M'). While this process of circulation accounts for how value is realised it does not account for valorisation. Such an explanation is provided in Marx's analysis of how surplus value originates in 'the hidden abode of production'<sup>149</sup> and is measured through another form of monetary exchange: the wage relation. The wage relation also forms the basis of the reproduction of the class relation. Both are dependent on the historically unique position of the proletariat, which as a result of the ongoing process of primitive accumulation, consists in a class of individuals 'who are free in a double sense.'<sup>150</sup> Since the proletariat does not own property and is legally free, workers are compelled to sell their productive activity in the commodified form of labour-power to the property-owning capitalist class. This commodity of proletarian labour-power is the 'source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself', or of what Marx

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<sup>145</sup> (Marx 2009, 159)

<sup>146</sup> (Marx 2009, 161)

<sup>147</sup> (Marx 2009, 161)

<sup>148</sup> (Marx 2009, 162)

<sup>149</sup> (Marx 2009, 279)

<sup>150</sup> (Marx 2009, 873)

terms ‘surplus value.’ Surplus-value is generated because the wage form – as the non-equivalent exchange of equivalents – does not compensate proletarians for the entirety of the value their labour generates. Instead, the wage form only pays proletarians enough to reproduce themselves at the bare minimal social average. The remainder of the value they produce – surplus value – becomes the property of the capitalist who endeavours to transform it into capital on the market.

This has several consequences. The wage form is the basis of (1) ‘The law of capitalist production’ which ‘can be reduced simply to this: the relation between capital, accumulation and the rate of wages is nothing other than the relation between the unpaid labour which has been transformed into capital and the additional paid labour necessary to set in motion this additional capital’.<sup>151</sup> It is also central to (2) the class relation in which the capitalist class endeavours to valorise capital through the exploitation of proletarian labour, and through the other means that Marx outlines in the rest of *Capital*; means that constitute the law of value. Thirdly, it founds (3) the manner in which labour is allocated in the specific form of capitalist social production (which, at this level of abstraction is divided among class-based lines) in the endeavour to valorise capital. This, as we shall see, receives its most concrete treatment in the Trinity Formula. Thus capital consists in a specific form of social labour that is generated by the class relation, is expressed by the private exchange of individuals in the impersonal form of money and is premised on the exploitation of a ‘doubly free’ work force.

However, this account of Marx’s analysis of the socially specific manner in which capital allocates labour does not account for the other aspect of Marx’s theory of value, such as the way in which the collectively constituted forms of value function as the autonomous entities – personified things that invert, compel and dominate individual actions. It is this aspect of Marx’s theory of value that is brought out in his theory of fetishism.

#### 4. Fetishism

As I will demonstrate Marx’s theory of fetishism explains the way in which these forms arise within the mode of social domination that they engender and

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<sup>151</sup> (Marx 2009, 771)

perpetuate. It does so by showing them to be the socially specific forms in which social labour appears within capitalist society, and by showing that these forms are possessed of the fetish-characteristic attributes that I referred to above. In demonstrating this latter point Marx shows that these forms function autonomously, that they operate through inverting the relation between subject and object, and that they thereby dominate the individuals concerned. As I indicated above, one of the points that I want to stress here is that these fetish-characteristic forms are not aspects of a mode of false consciousness but rather of the social character of capitalist labour. They pertain to the sense in which the manifestations of abstract social labour, as bearers of value, function as personified autonomous entities that dominate and compel the actions of the individuals who collectively constitute them. It will also be made clear that this theory of fetishism differentiates itself from Marx's account of social domination in his theory of alienation by providing an account for the constitution of social domination that relies on the categories of abstract labour, capital, surplus value and the constituent properties of social domination that include Marx's development of the fetish characteristic forms of the personified properties of things.

I'll begin here by showing how these elements of Marx's theory are expressed and identifiable within the section of the first chapter of Vol. I that deals with the fetish-character of commodities. I will then move on to demonstrate that they are magnified in the fetish-characteristic form of money and in the fetish-characteristics of capital. When capital is introduced in Marx's unfolding exposition, the fetish-form becomes more abstract and autonomous, whilst conversely domination becomes more concrete in the personifications of the class-relation. I draw this out in an examination of the Trinity Formula. This is because the Trinity Formula, according to Marx's own résumé of the three volumes of *Capital*, provides the most concrete application of the concept of fetishism; for it presents a theory of the composition and characteristics of social domination which also accounts for the particular manner in which social labour is allocated.

#### **4.1 The Fetish Character of Commodities**

Commodity fetishism has received ample commentary and has also provided the basis for many social theories. In these commentaries and theories, the section of *Capital* that details '[t]he fetish-character of commodities and its secret' is often



interpreted independently of the first three sections of the chapter in which it is located. This reductive interpretation misses that the four sections in chapter one of *Capital* form a conceptual whole, so that Marx's analysis of the fetish-character of commodities relies on understanding 'its secrets', i.e. that which Marx has shown in the chapter's first three sections. Marx refers to this relationship between the four sections of part one at a later point in *Capital*<sup>152</sup>

Immanent in the commodity there is an antithesis between use-value and value, between private labour which must simultaneously manifest itself as directly social labour, and a particular concrete kind of labour which simultaneously counts as merely abstract general labour, between the personification of things and the reification of persons.<sup>153</sup>

It also neglects that just as Marx understands the commodity to be the elementary form of wealth ('[t]he wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production reigns, presents itself as an 'immense heap of commodities.' The single commodity presents itself as the elementary form of wealth.'<sup>154</sup>), so too is the fetish-character of the commodity the elementary form of fetishism. The neglect of such factors often leads to interpretations of fetishism as what Lefebvre terms the economic form of alienation, and grant to this section a pervasive importance such as Lukács' statement that the fetish character of commodities 'contains within itself the whole of historical materialism'<sup>155</sup>, and form the basis for a number of interpretations

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<sup>152</sup> Backhaus' remark on the ramifications of this analysis of fetishism are pertinent *qua* the relationship between alienation and fetishism: 'The presentation of commodity fetishism which misses its essence can be thus characterized: the authors refer to some sentence from the fetishism chapter of *Capital* and interpret them, conceptually and also for the most part terminologically, in the manner of the *German Ideology*, a manuscript in which the meaning of the labour theory of value was still unknown. The usual quote is 'the social connections of their private labour *appears* as what they are ie., not as immediate social relations of persons in their labouring activity but rather as *thing-like relations* of persons and *social relations of things*. From this quote it is simply read that social relations have 'made themselves autonomous' vis-a-vis humans. A comment which constitutes the theme of the early writings and has become a common-place of conservative cultural critique under the catchword of alienation or depersonalization. The point of the *critique* of political economy, however, is not the mere description of this existing fact, but the analysis of its genesis.' (Backhaus 1980, 103-4)

<sup>153</sup> (Marx 2009, 209) Fowkes also translates this passage as 'the conversion of things into persons and persons into things.'

<sup>154</sup> (Marx 2009, 125)

<sup>155</sup> (Lukács 1972, 170)

of fetishism as ‘false consciousness’, fetishism as ‘alienation’, and fetishism as ‘reification’.

In contrast to these accounts, I will now show how Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism integrates his form-analysis of the commodity into an account of the collective constitution of the fetish-character of the commodity through the reified social relations of persons and the personification of things,<sup>156</sup> and that it conceives the constituent fetish-characteristic properties of the commodity as the autonomous personification of things which invert, and thereby dominate and compel individuals.

The integration of Marx’s theory of fetishism with his preceding analysis is signalled in the third paragraph of the fetish-character section. What Marx attributes to the ‘mysterious character’ of the commodity-form refers to the arguments of the first three sections of the chapter. For the first time, Marx also describes how human activity is reified and objectified in the process of constituting this form. The first sentence in this paragraph – ‘the equality of the kinds of human labour takes on a physical form in the thing-like objectivity of the products of labour as values’<sup>157</sup> – thus refers to abstract labour and its ‘embodiment’ in the value of commodities; an ‘embodiment’ that was laid out in the first three sections. The second sentence refers to socially necessary labour time’s determination of value.<sup>158</sup> The final sentence addresses how social relations are reified as value is realised in exchange: ‘the relations between the producers, in which those social determinations of their labours asserts themselves and are sustained, take the form of a social relation between the products of labour.’<sup>159</sup>

The next paragraph is the celebrated passage on the fetish-character of commodities. It is here that Marx moves to discuss ‘the personification of things’ in the fetish-characteristic form of the commodity. His description of the fetish-characteristic form of the commodity is thus reliant upon his previous analysis, because the fetish-characteristic form of the commodity is generated by that which he summarised in the previous paragraph:

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<sup>156</sup> A similar distinction between personification and reification is made by Rubin and Althusser in the entry on fetishism in the glossary to *Reading Capital*. See (Althusser and Balibar 2009, 313)

<sup>157</sup> (Marx 2009, 164)

<sup>158</sup> ‘[T]he measure of labour by time takes the form of the quantity of the value of the commodities.’ (Marx 2009, 281-82)

<sup>159</sup> (Marx 2009, 164)

What is mysterious about the commodity form is therefore simply that the characteristics of men's own labour are reflected back to them as objective characteristics inherent in the products of their labour, as quasi-physical properties of things and that therefore also the social relation of the producers to the aggregate labour is reflected as a social relation of objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside of producers. Through this quid pro quo, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time extrasensory or social. The commodity form of the products of labour, and the value-relation in which it represents itself, have absolutely nothing to do with the physical nature of the products or with any relations they have as physical objects. It is the specific social relation of the people themselves which assumes for them, as in an optical illusion, the form of a relation of things ... I call this the fetishism of commodities, which sticks to products of labour as soon as they are commodities.

It is important to stress here that this fetish-characteristic form of the commodity is described as 'the personification of things' or as relations between personified things. This is because the personification of the fetish-character of commodities refers not to how labour is transformed into things<sup>160</sup> but to Marx's discussion of value and the value relation, which takes place in exchange in the relations between things. The fetish-character of the commodities – like the peculiarities of the equivalent form – therefore refers to properties that stick to commodities by virtue of the process of atomised production and exchange, and through the value form, which make commodities the bearers of value.<sup>161</sup> This can also

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<sup>160</sup> As is the case with Lukács and the adherents of the fetishism of 'reification' account of fetishism.

<sup>161</sup> Marx refers to this relationship between the fetish-character of commodities and analysis of value in *Notes on Wagner* where the properties of the fetish-character of commodities are referred to as the social character of labour in which value appertains essentially to *the thing itself*. 'Now if Rodbertus – and I will point out later why he did not see it – had gone on to analyse the exchange-value of commodities – for it only exists where *commodity* occurs in the plural, different sorts of commodities, then he would have found 'value' behind this form of appearance. If he had further gone on to investigate value, he would have further found that here the thing, the 'use-value', amounts to a mere *concretisation* of human labour, as the *expenditure of equal human labour-power*, and therefore this content is presented as the *concrete* character of the *thing*, as a character appertaining essentially to *the thing itself*, although this objectivity does *not* appear in its natural form which, however, necessitates a special *form of value*. He would have found, then, that the 'value' of the commodity merely expresses in a historically developed form something which also exists in all other historical forms of society, albeit *in a different form, namely the social character of labour*, insofar as it exists as *expenditure of 'social' labour-power*. If, then, 'the value' of the commodity is merely a particular historical form of something which exists in all forms of society, the same must be true of the 'social use-value,' as it characterises the 'use-value' of the

be seen in Marx's description of the value component of the commodity as a 'sensible-supersensible', 'absurd' or 'perverted' form. The later term is a translation of *verrückte Form* which has two meanings that signify the mad, insane and displaced social characteristics of the commodity form.<sup>162</sup>

In addition, the paragraphs that follow the definition of the fetish-character of commodities demonstrate the link between the phenomena of reified social relations, the personification of things and Marx's form-analysis. This can be seen in Marx's explicit statement that, as his 'foregoing analysis has already demonstrated, this fetish-character of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of labour which produced them.'<sup>163</sup> Marx uses some unfortunate terminology such as 'reflection' and some similarly unfortunate metaphors taken from the natural sciences in his definition of the fetish-character of commodities. However these paragraphs signify that the latter is not a false consciousness generated by the complexity of exchange, but rather a practical abstraction, collectively constituted by people performing the activities of atomised production for exchange that renders the value relation necessary and which necessarily constitutes commodities as personified bearers of value.

The first paragraph that follows this famous passage thus provides an explication of the necessarily reified social relationships that occur as a result of atomised production for exchange. This means that 'since the producers do not come into social contact until they exchange the products of their labour, the special social characteristics of private labour appear only within this exchange.'<sup>164</sup> So 'that the private labours take effect, through their activity, as elements of the social aggregate labour only through the connections which the act of exchange establishes between

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commodity. Mr. Rodbertus has the measure of the magnitude of value from Ricardo; but he himself has neither examined nor grasped the substance of value any more than Ricardo did; e.g. the 'communal' character of the [labour process] in the primitive community as the common organism of the labour-powers belonging together, and hence that of *their labour*, i.e. the expenditure of these powers. (Marx 1996)

<sup>162</sup> For a further discussion of the translation of this term see (Werner Bonefeld et al. 1995), (Heinrich 2012)

<sup>163</sup> As Ehrbar notes Marx's draft of this sentence makes the relation even more explicit. 'If we ask the further question where this fetish-character of the commodity stems from, this secret has already been resolved by the preceding analysis. It springs from the special social character of labour which produces commodities and the corresponding peculiar social relation of the commodity producers.' (Marx 2009, 458)

<sup>164</sup> (Marx 2009, 165)

the products and, through their products' mediation, between the producers.'<sup>165</sup> As a result Marx's conception of appearance *qua* perverted social constitution - in which the social relation appears in the value relation - can be seen in the following:

To the producers therefore, the social relations between their private labours *appear as what they are*, i.e., not as direct labour processes themselves, but rather as *material relations* of persons and *social relations of things*.<sup>166</sup>

The second paragraph integrates this account of reified social relationships with the form-analysis of the first three sections. This paragraph also emphasises that the practical activity of atomised production's realisation in exchange is constitutive of the practical abstraction of value. The former can be seen in relation to abstract labour and value in the value-relation when Marx states that 'It is only during [...] exchange that the products of labour acquire a uniform social objectivity as values, which is distinct from their varied sensuous objectivities as use-values.'<sup>167</sup> These issues are fused in the following statement: 'Equality of entirely different kinds of labour can be arrived at only by an abstraction from the real inequality, by a reduction to the characteristic they have in common, that of being the expenditure of human labour in the abstract.'<sup>168</sup> A sentence that Marx put into the French edition, stresses the importance of the practical activity of exchange for this process of abstraction: 'exchange accomplishes this reduction by bringing into mutual presence on an equal footing the products of the most diverse labours.'<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> (Marx 2009, 165)

<sup>166</sup> (Marx 2009, 165) This can also be seen in several other comments Marx makes in the section that this abstraction is 'valid for this particular form of production (production of commodities), namely, that the specific social character of independent private labours consists in their equality as human labour and assumes the form of the value-character of the product' (Marx 2009, 165) and that '[t]he categories of bourgeois economics [...] are forms of thought which are socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of social production' (Marx 2009, 167). Finally it is also echoed in *The Contribution*: 'A social relation of production appears as something existing apart from individual human beings, and the determined relations into which they enter in the course of production in society appear as the specific properties of a thing - it is this perverted appearance, this prosaically real, and by no means imaginary, mystification that is characteristic of all forms of labour positing exchange-value.' (Marx 2010, 49)

<sup>167</sup> (Marx 2009, 167)

<sup>168</sup> (Marx 2009, 167)

<sup>169</sup> This phrase is quoted in (Ehbar 2009)

In Marx's view, this fetish-character of the commodities is thus constituted by collective acts of exchange in which people are unaware that the value relation that they are entering into involves positing different kinds of abstract human labour as being abstractly equivalent to one another.<sup>170</sup> Although they are not immediately aware of this, their actions are structured by the very same logic of production for exchange that is posited in the value-relation, and which constitutes this abstraction by imbuing commodities with the 'common character, as values' possessed by these materially different things.<sup>171</sup>

This division of the product into a useful thing and an embodiment of value is only then carried out in practice when exchange has become sufficiently extensive and important to allow useful things to be produced for the exchange, so that their character as value is already taken into account during production. From this moment on, the labour of the private producers in fact acquires a two-fold social existence. On the one hand it must, as a specific useful kind of labour, satisfy a specific social need, and thus prove itself as an element of aggregate labour, as a branch of the spontaneously developed social division of labour, on the other hand, it can satisfy the manifold needs of its producer only in so far as each particular useful private labour can be exchange with, i.e. counts as the equal of, every other kind of private labour.<sup>172</sup>

As a result, producers focus on production for exchange rather than reflecting on their actions whilst the appearance of exchange becomes the naturalised standpoint of political economy.<sup>173</sup>

Thus Marx's account of the constitution of the fetish-characteristic form of the commodity integrates his form-analysis with reified social relations and the personification of things. Reified social relations arise from the social character of capitalist labour in which atomised production for exchange transforms social relations into relations between things. This process also causes these things to possess fetish-

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<sup>170</sup> This component of Marx's theory—that people participate in these relations without being aware of them—can be seen to coincide with his reference to this collectively constituted social process of exchange occurring behind the backs of individuals. Rather than fetishism consisting in false consciousness these phrases point toward the peculiar social character of labour that capitalism consists in.

<sup>171</sup> (Marx 2009, 167)

<sup>172</sup> (Marx 2009, 166)

<sup>173</sup> Since the naturalisation of the social character of capitalist production pertains to the mystifying aspect of fetishism that I am not concerned with, I will refrain from further discussion. However, I will reiterate that I follow the distinction made by (Ehrbar 2009), (Schultz 2013), (Gray 2013) and made elsewhere by (Arthur 2013) that Marx's discussion of naturalisation in this section pertains to political economists rather than to the agents engaged in production and exchange.

characteristic forms. Their fetish-characteristic forms consist in things being imbued with 'quasi-physical' and objective characteristics that function as inherent properties of these things. The fetish-characteristics of these forms further consist in the way in which they function autonomously by relating to each other 'apart from and outside' their producers. Thus the fetish-characteristic properties of the commodity consist in these qualities of personification, which arise from the perverted, mad and displaced social character of the value relation.

The manner in which these autonomous properties of the fetish-form of the commodity are collectively constituted is also constitutive of an abstract form of social domination that is also referred to by Marx in several passages in this section. At this point in his presentation Marx's analysis is concerned with presenting the form-analysis of capitalism. He has not introduced the class relation, nor demonstrated how this relation functions to reproduce this overall form of domination. Marx's statements on domination are therefore concerned with the ways in which these forms are constitutive of an abstract form of social domination that inverts, and thereby collectively subordinates the social relations that collectively constitute it. This can be seen in his earlier comment that commodities function 'apart from and outside' their producers it can also be seen in his statement that the precarious levelling qualities of socially necessary labour possess the qualities of a 'regulative law of nature' – so much so that he likens it to gravity causing a house to collapse – because the magnitude of value varies 'continually, independently of the will, foreknowledge and actions of the exchangers.'<sup>174</sup>

This can also be seen in Marx's statement that this form of social production has 'mastery over man', and in his claim that the fetish-characteristic of the value relations of commodities consists in an inversion whereby:

Their own movement within society has for them the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them.'<sup>175</sup>

Marx's theory of commodity fetishism thus demonstrates: how the fetish-character of the commodity is constituted. It does so by integrating his form-analysis with an account of the collectively reified social relations that are engendered by

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<sup>174</sup> (Marx 2009, 168)

<sup>175</sup> (Marx 2009, 168) Anticipating Lukács's and Adorno's utilisation of the term 'second nature' to describe this type of supra-individual domination, Marx also describes socially necessary labour time 'asserting itself as a regulative law of nature.'

production for exchange and which subsequently involve the personification of things. It also demonstrates that the fetish-characteristic properties of these personified and autonomous things function in the relation of exchange to invert and dominate the people who collectively constitute them. In Marx's ensuing analyses of the fetish-characteristic forms of value, these autonomous properties are magnified whilst their dominating properties are concretised.

## **4.2 The Fetish-Characteristic Form of Money**

This can first be seen in Marx's discussion of the fetish-characteristic form of money, the properties of which are reliant upon its logical derivation in the value-form section. The fetish-characteristic form of money therefore stems from the function of money as the universal equivalent. Its properties are based on the peculiarities of the equivalent form, which make the commodity serving the function of the general equivalent independent, and which also cause it to appear as though it was granted by this role the 'natural' aspects of the thing itself. These peculiarities are 'crystallized' in the money form, which means that although the money form only possesses its function when it operates as the general equivalent, it nonetheless 'seems' to work the other way around, i.e. as if 'all other commodities universally express their value in a particular commodity because it is money.'<sup>176</sup> Money's function as the general equivalent grants it personified and autonomous properties which Marx refers to as the 'magic of money', and through which 'money becomes [...] the immediate incarnation of all human labour.'<sup>177</sup>

Like the fetish-characteristic form of commodities, the 'magic of money' is therefore not a false impression that masks some real underlying process. In Marx's view the fetish-characteristic form of money is socially constituted by the atomised social production for exchange that is specific to capitalism, and which logically requires the general equivalent of the money form.

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<sup>176</sup> Although a particular commodity only becomes money because all other commodities express their values in it, it seems, on the contrary, that all other commodities universally express their values in a particular commodity because it is money. The movement which mediated this process vanishes in its own result, leaving no trace behind. Without any initiative on their part, the commodities find their own value-materiality ready to hand, in the form of a physical commodity existing outside and alongside them. (Marx 2009, 187)

<sup>177</sup> (Marx 2009, 187)



They can only bring their commodities into relation as value, and therefore as commodities, by bringing them into an opposing relation with some other commodity, which serves as the universal equivalent. We have already reached that result by our analysis of the commodity. But only the action of society can turn a particular commodity into the universal equivalent.<sup>178</sup>

This means that:

The money crystal is a necessary product of the exchange process, in which different products of labour are in fact equated with each other, and thus are in fact converted into commodities.<sup>179</sup>

Money's fetish-characteristic form, as the universal equivalent, is therefore a more pronounced development of the way in which Marx's theory of fetishism describes the social constitution of forms of value and uses the notion of fetish-character to describe the autonomous and personified properties of these forms of value. This can be seen in Marx's summary of how the fetish-character of money is constituted by the social character of capitalist labour. There he compares the money fetish with the fetish-character of commodities as follows:

The merely atomistic behaviour of men in their social process of production, and hence the fact that their own relations of production take on an objectified form independent of their conscious individual striving, manifests themselves at first in the fact that the products of labour generally take the form of commodities. The riddle of the money fetish is therefore merely the riddle of the commodity fetish that has become visible and blinding to the eyes.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> (Marx 2009, 180)

<sup>179</sup> (Marx 2009, 181)

<sup>180</sup> (Marx 2009, 187) A similar passage in the *Critique* also demonstrates that Marx views money as possessing the qualities that I am attributing to the term fetish-character: 'Nature no more produces money than it does bankers or a rate of exchange. But since in bourgeois production, wealth as a fetish must be crystallised in a particular substance gold and silver are its appropriate embodiment. Gold and silver are not by nature money, but money consists by its nature of gold and silver. Gold or silver as crystallisation of money is, on the one hand, not only the product of the circulation process but actually its sole stable product; gold and silver are, on the other hand, finished primary products, and they directly represent both these aspects, which are not distinguished by specific forms. The universal products of the social process, or the social process itself considered as a product, is a particular natural product, a metal, which is contained in the earth's crust and can be dug up.' (Marx 2010, 29)

In contrast to the analysis in chapter one, Marx's account of the dominating properties of the money form accounts for the agents who exchange commodities. However, Marx's analysis still focuses on how these autonomous forms of value determine the actions of the agents who exchange them. These autonomous properties stem from the social conditions that Marx elaborates later in his discussion on money:

Our owners of commodities therefore find out that the same division of labour that turns them into independent private producers, [also] makes the social process of production and their relations within that process independent of them themselves, and that the seeming mutual independence of the individuals from one another is supplemented by a system of all-round material dependence.<sup>181</sup>

As a result the autonomous form of money inverts, structures and dominates in Marx's account, the agents, in a way which is more concrete than in the fetish character of commodities. Marx shows that this is the case in two ways: by deriving (a) the conceptual structure of legal contracts from the exchange structure, and (b) the function of the commodity owner from the commodity.

Marx elucidates how the value-relation of commodity exchange determines the legal contract by arguing that it necessitates a certain 'juridical relation.' This juridical relation relies on conceiving commodity owners as atomised individuals who recognise each other as owners of private property.<sup>182</sup> In Marx's view, this conception 'mirrors' the economic relation of commodity exchange. The 'juridical relation' is therefore 'determined' by this socio-economic relation.<sup>183</sup>

In Marx's view, this is likewise the case for the commodity owners. Owning a commodity determines inter-subjective behaviour and ultimately compels the behaviour of subjects. In the inter-subjective act of exchange 'the persons exist here for one another only as representatives of commodities.'<sup>184</sup> The behaviour of these subjects is compelled to conform to models according with commodity exchange because the persons' economic character masks are mere personifications of the

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<sup>181</sup> (Marx 2009, 87)

<sup>182</sup> In this instance Marx derives the juridical form of law from exchange in a manner that differs from the way in which Lukács treats law as analogous to the properties of the commodity in his social theory of reification as I will show in the following chapter.

<sup>183</sup> This is drawn out in Marx's comments on freedom, equality and Bentham (Marx 2009, 280)

<sup>184</sup> (Marx 2009, 178)

economic relations as whose carriers they confront each other.<sup>185</sup> These strands are drawn together in Marx's discussion of commodity owners. Marx turns to assess the relationship between form-determination and rationality in the behaviour of commodity owners by asserting that commodity owners 'have already acted before thinking.'<sup>186</sup> As 'character masks' the determination of exchange asserts itself in the actions and instincts of commodity owners: 'The natural laws of the commodity have manifested themselves in the natural instinct of the owners of the commodities.'<sup>187</sup>

I argued earlier that Marx's account of the fetish grows more complex as his analysis progresses, and one can see from the above that the fetish-character of money possesses more pronounced characteristics than the fetish-character of commodities. On the one hand, money is socially constituted as the general equivalent by the logic of the relations of commodities, which grants it the autonomous and personified properties of the universal incarnation of human labour. On the other hand, the means by which these autonomous properties invert and dominate individual action is concretised in the determinate form of the legal contract and the determination of the actions of commodity owners.

### 4.3 The Fetish-Characteristic Properties of Capital

Having dealt with the fetish-attributes of money we turn now to those of capital itself; and we can begin here by remarking that since, as we have seen, the general formula of capital is composed by the commodity form and money form; and since these forms, as we've seen, possess fetish-characteristics, capital – because it is the constant, socially pervasive movement between these forms of value – also possesses fetish-characteristic properties. This can be seen in Marx's description of the autonomous and personified properties of capital. In Volume I of *Capital* Marx describes capital as an 'automatic subject', composed of 'self-valorising value': as a process that 'is continually changing from one form into another, without losing itself

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<sup>185</sup> (Marx 2009, 179)

<sup>186</sup> (Marx 2009, 180) Here we have a continuation of Marx's argument of the fetish-character of commodities as the practical abstractions of exchange generated by activity that agents participate in without being aware of it.

<sup>187</sup> (Marx 2009, 180) Marx is using 'natural' in a critical sense here as he does throughout *Capital*. As we have seen in our discussion of the fetish-character of commodity, commodities are socio-natural phenomena that assert themselves like a 'regulative law of nature'.

in this movement',<sup>188</sup> and thus as a 'self-moving substance': 'value is [...] the subject of a process, in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude [...] By virtue of being value, it has acquired the *occult quality* to add value to it-self.'<sup>189</sup> Finally, the social reality of these practically constituted forms of value can be seen in Marx's comments that 'those who consider the autonomisation of value as a mere abstraction, forget that the movement of capital is this abstraction in action.'<sup>190</sup>

Comments on the manner in which these autonomous properties of capital invert and thereby compel and dominate individuals are also littered throughout *Capital*, perhaps most famously evidenced in the following remark: 'just as man is governed, in religion, by the products of his own brain, so, in capitalist production, he is governed by the products of his own hand.'<sup>191</sup>

It is also reflected in how these abstract forms invert and thereby compel both sides of the class relation. 'Capital employs labour. This in itself exhibits the relationship in its simple form and entails the personification of things and the objectification [*versachlichung*] of persons.'<sup>192</sup>

Finally it can also be seen in the more concrete levels of Marx's analysis, where the autonomous properties of capital as an automatic subject invert, coerce and govern the actions of individuals in both sides of the class relation.

For the capitalist, this form of domination consists in functioning as a 'character mask' or as the 'personification of capital.'<sup>193</sup> The capitalist functions in this manner because the atomised, competitive structure of capitalism and the autonomous fetish-characteristic forms of value enforce the inherent laws of capitalist production as 'external coercive necessities confronting the individual capitalist.'<sup>194</sup> These external necessities 'enter into the consciousness of the capitalist as his or her 'driving motives.'<sup>195</sup> The capitalist is therefore compelled to compete with fellow capitalists as 'hostile brothers' and to act as a 'despotic' manager of his workforce in order to 'keep

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<sup>188</sup> (Marx 2009, 255)

<sup>189</sup> (Marx 2009, 255, corrected translation)

<sup>190</sup> (Marx 2009, 185)

<sup>191</sup> (Marx 2009 772)

<sup>192</sup> (Marx 2009, 1054)

<sup>193</sup> (Marx 2009, 739)

<sup>194</sup> (Marx 2009, 381)

<sup>195</sup> (Marx 2009, 381)

constantly expanding his capital, in order to preserve it.’<sup>196</sup> Thus, the capitalists’ ‘mania [...] is the result of the social mechanism in which he is but one of the drive wheels.’<sup>197</sup> Yet there is no guarantee that the capitalist can expand his or her capital. The contingency inherent in the capitalist market may ruin her and force her into the other side of the class relation. The domination exerted by the capitalists results from their actions, but the latter are in turn shaped by their role as personifications of capital; as individuals determined by the fetish-characteristic forms of value that are external to them, and which compel them to dominate and exploit the proletariat. Thus, because capitalists - as capital personified - are ‘fanatically intent on the valorization of value’ they ‘ruthlessly compel the human race to produce for production’s sake.’<sup>198</sup>

This, of course also means, that domination is more acute for the proletariat.<sup>199</sup> As doubly free individuals who are compelled to sell their labour-power in order to survive they are prey to the ‘dull compulsion’ of these economic relations in which they have ‘brought their ‘own hide to market and now’ have ‘nothing else to expect – but a good tanning.’<sup>200</sup> This is because the way in which domination manifests itself for the proletariat is embodied in the proletariat’s function in the class relation where they ‘produce material, objective wealth [...] in the form of capital [...] an alien power that dominates and exploits him.’<sup>201</sup> This is reflected in a situation in which ‘[w]ithin the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker; this means that they become means of domination and exploitation of the production, they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine.’<sup>202</sup> As a result the worker ‘exists to satisfy the need of the existing value for valorisation, as opposed to the inverse situation, in which objective wealth is there to satisfy the worker’s own need for development’<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> (Marx 2009, 738)

<sup>197</sup> (Marx 2009, 776)

<sup>198</sup> (Marx 2009, 739)

<sup>199</sup> Marx’s clearest explication of this comes in *The Results of the Immediate Process of Production* - ‘The functions fulfilled by the capitalist are no more than the functions of capital [...] the capitalist functions only as *personified* capital, capital as a person, just as the worker is no more than *labour* personified. That labour is for him just effort and torment.’ (Marx 2009, 989)

<sup>200</sup> (Marx 2009, 280)

<sup>201</sup> (Marx 2009, 716)

<sup>202</sup> (Marx 2009, 548)

<sup>203</sup> (Marx 2009, 772)

As I have shown, Marx's theory of value accounts for: (1) the socially specific manner in which social labour is allocated in capital; and (2) the constitution and the constituents of a fetish-characteristic form of social domination of capital, in which the collectively constituted fetish-characteristic forms of value invert, coerce and dictate individual action. I will now account for how these elements are fused in the Trinity Formula as the culmination and concrete embodiment of Marx's theory of fetishism where I will demonstrate how Marx's analysis of the Trinity Formula embeds the fetish-characteristic properties of his theory of value in the concrete forms of the Trinity Formula in his account of how surplus value constitutes the perverted revenue streams of rent, wages and capital.

#### 4.4 The Trinity Formula

Before setting out that demonstration it is however first necessary to outline two factors that have detracted from the analysis of the way in which fetishism informs the Trinity Formula. The first is the egregious error that Engels made when compiling Marx's fragments on the Trinity Formula in the incorrect order.<sup>204</sup> The second is the problem of terminological variation. The terms that Marx uses in the Trinity Formula are somewhat inconsistent with his usage in his other analyses of the fetish-character.<sup>205</sup> Some of his usage of these terms in the Trinity Formula is also ambiguous. The term 'fetishism' is only used once in reference to interest-bearing capital, and fetish-character, fetish form etc. are not used at all. Marx also uses the terms 'mystification' and 'mystical character' to describe the conceptions about capitalism that are generated by its complexity. These mystified conceptions are generated by the same process that constitutes fetish-characteristic forms of value. Like the fetishism of political economy, these mystified conceptions consist in distorted conceptions that people have about capitalism. Yet unlike the fetishism of political economy, these conceptions are objectively generated. The similarity between fetish-characteristic

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<sup>204</sup> As (Heinrich 1996/1997) points out, Engels thought he had found three separate fragments that Marx had written on the Trinity formula. Engels labelled the two shorter fragments I and II and the longer fragment III. The Trinity Formula is published in this order in *Capital III*. Subsequent analysis of Marx's manuscripts revealed that fragments I and II fit into one of the gaps in part III. Structuring the Trinity Formula this way makes Marx's analysis of the Trinity Formula more coherent.

<sup>205</sup> This may be because the 'trinity formula' was composed prior to volume I.

forms, the fetishism of political economy and mystification can lead to Marx's entire analysis of the Trinity Formula being treated as an analysis of mystification, in which mystification, fetish-characteristic forms and the fetishism of political economy are all collapsed into one another. However, the properties of the forms of value that we have seen Marx describe with the term fetish-character are present in his description of the 'perverted', 'autonomous' and personified 'social character of things.' I will therefore show that what exists of the Trinity Formula can be seen to mark the culmination of Marx's theorisation of fetish-characteristic forms in *Capital*. This is because Marx's analysis in the Trinity Formula: (a) demonstrates how the fetish-forms of value are embodied in the Trinity Formula, (b) fuses the fetish aspects of his theory of value with the distributive aspect of his theory of value, and (c) posits the Trinity Formula as the apex of his analyses in *Capital*, as the 'perverted topsy-turvy world' of the Trinity Formula is constitutive of his concrete analysis of fetishism.

The 'agents of production', 'bearers of various functions'<sup>206</sup> and political economists conceive of the Trinity Formula of land-rent, labour-wages and interest/profit-capital as three separate revenue-generating entities. Marx's analysis of this formula utilises his critical genetic method to disclose its social genesis.

The starting point of this analysis exemplifies the conceptual structure of Marx's theory of social domination, in which the essence of social labour appears in the Trinity Formula. Marx's analysis of the social constitution of the Trinity Formula thus begins with his definition of what it presupposes: capital as a socially specific form of production; a form of production that consists of the way in which social labour interacts with things and nature, and thereby constitutes society.<sup>207</sup>

The analysis of the Trinity Formula that follows shows how this historically specific form of production is indicative of the Trinity Formula.

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<sup>206</sup> (Marx 1993, 950)

<sup>207</sup> 'We have seen how the capitalist process of production is a historically specific form of the social production process in general. This last is both a production process of the material conditions of existence for human life, and a process, proceeding in specific economic and historical relations of production, that produces and reproduces these relations of production themselves, and with them the bearers of this process, their material conditions of existence, and their mutual relationships, i.e. the specific economic form of their society. For the totality of these relationships which the bearers of this production have towards nature and one another, the relationships in which they produce, is precisely society, viewed according to its economic structure.' (Marx 1993, 957)

In the first place, since capital is a historically specific social form of production, so too are the other elements of the Trinity Formula. As Marx's analysis of so-called 'primitive accumulation' demonstrated, capitalist production is the result of the historical process that transformed common land into monopolised private property, thereby creating a work force compelled to sell their labour-power to survive. Consequently: 'Wage-labour and landed property, like capital, are historically specific social forms; one of labour, and the other of the monopolised earth, both in fact being forms corresponding to capital and belonging to the same economic formation of society.'<sup>208</sup>

In the second place, the fetish-characteristics of capital are mirrored in the Trinity Formula. Capital is a mode of social production in which the atomised constitution of the class relation creates fetish-characteristic forms of value that possess personified autonomous properties, and which invert, and thus induce the action of capitalists, and govern the proletariat.<sup>209</sup> So too are the Trinitarian forms of revenue. This can be seen initially in the self-generating properties that all branches of the Trinity Formula share where the individual streams of revenue for interest and profit, rent and wages appear as the 'productive fruits' of capital, land and labour, 'in such a way that each individual source is related to its product as something extruded from it and produced by it.'<sup>210</sup> It can also be seen in the role of the land-owner, who takes on the role of the personification of property.<sup>211</sup> Finally, it is evident in the properties of the different elements of the Trinity Formula, which share the personified and autonomous properties of the fetish-characteristic forms of value:

It is not only the workers' products which are transformed into independent powers, the products as masters and buyers of their producers, but the social powers and interconnecting form of this labour also confront them as properties of their product.

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<sup>208</sup> (Marx 1993, 956)

<sup>209</sup> 'Capital, land, labour! But capital is not a thing, it is a definite social relation of production pertaining to a particular historical social formation, which simply takes the form of a thing and gives this thing a specific social character. Capital is not the sum of the material and produced means of production. Capital is the means of production as transformed into capital, these being no more capital in themselves than gold or silver are money. It is the means of production monopolized by a particular section of society, the products and conditions of activity of labour-power, which are rendered autonomous vis-a-vis this living labour-power and are personified in capital through this antithesis.' (Marx 1993, 954-55)

<sup>210</sup> (Marx 1993, 953)

<sup>211</sup> (Marx 1993, 952)



Here we therefore have one factor of a historically produced social production process in a definite social form.<sup>212</sup>

In the third place, the socially specific character of capitalist production is responsible for the constitution of the Trinity Formula. It is this aspect of Marx's analysis that accounts for the constitution of the Trinity Formula by demonstrating how social labour appears within the former as the annual income of the capitalist class, the landowning class and the working class. These types of income thus appear as the 'perennial fruits' of land, labour and capital. However, they 'presuppose[s]'[...] 'the total value of the annual product, which is nothing more than objectified social labour'<sup>213</sup> in the 'perverted form' of the Trinity Formula. Marx's explanation of the genesis of the Trinity Formula thus links this perverted form with what it presupposes. In doing so this also demonstrates my argument that Marx's theory of the Trinity Formula is the culmination of how his conception of fetishism formulates a theory of social domination.

This account begins with an analysis of what these elements share in common: they are 'portions of value'<sup>214</sup> and are 'expressed in money.'<sup>215</sup> It then moves to an account of how these portions of value are constituted by the surplus-value that is expressed in money. In this account, the surplus-value that is created by labour through the mechanism of the wage relation constitutes capital, rent and wages. This is because surplus-value is divided into income, which is distributed in the forms of capital, rent and wages. Surplus-value is distributed in these forms because land, labour and capital are integral aspects of the socially specific form of capitalist production: Labour because of its aforementioned role in the constitution of surplus value; Capital because it is premised on 'pumping surplus-value' out of labour; and Land – in the form of monopolised property – because its instrumental role in creating the socially specific conditions of capitalist production makes it a 'permanent magnet for attracting a part of the surplus-value.' As a result:

Landed property, capital and wage-labour are therefore transformed from sources of revenue in the sense that capital attracts to the capitalist a portion of the surplus-value which it extracts from labour, in the form of profit; monopoly in the earth attracts

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<sup>212</sup> (Marx 1993, 955)

<sup>213</sup> (Marx 1993, 961)

<sup>214</sup> (Marx 1993, 961)

<sup>215</sup> (Marx 1993, 962)

another part to the landowner in the form of rent ; and labour gives the worker the final portion of value that is still available in the form of the wage - from sources by virtue of which one part of the value is transformed into the form of profit, a second into the form of rent and a third into the form of wages - into real sources from which these portions of value themselves arise, together with the portions of the product related to them, in which they exist or against which they are convertible, the value of the product therefore itself arising from these as its ultimate source.<sup>216</sup>

The way this perverted form of the Trinity Formula appears has several further repercussions. In the first place, the manner in which surplus-value appears in the internally related distribution of revenue in the branches of the Trinity Formula causes these historically specific conditions to be trans-historically hypostatized.<sup>217</sup> In the second place, the manner in which the Trinity Formula is constituted necessitates the reproduction of wage-labourers leading to the production and reproduction of these autonomous and dominating conditions of capitalist social production.<sup>218</sup>

Marx's analysis of the Trinity Formula thus embeds the fetish-characteristic properties of his theory of value in the concrete forms of the Trinity Formula by demonstrating how surplus-value constitutes these personified and autonomous revenue streams. These streams are premised on the socially specific form of capitalist production and are constitutive of the personification of the capitalists and land-owners, and of the domination and reproduction of the conditions of existence of the

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<sup>216</sup> (Marx 1993, 950)

<sup>217</sup> 'Labour as such, in its simple characterization as purposive productive activity, is related to the means of production not in their characteristic social form but rather in their material substance, as the material and means of labour in which they are distinguished from one another only materially, as use-values, the earth as non-produced means of labour, the others as produced. If labour and wage-labour thus coincide, so too do the particular social form in which the conditions of labour confront labour, and their own material existence. The means of labour are then capital as such, while the earth as such is landed property. The formal autonomy these conditions of labour acquire vis-a-vis labour, the particular form of this autonomy they possess, is then a property inseparable from them as things, as material conditions of production; an immanently ingrown character that necessarily falls to them as elements of production. Their social character in the capitalist production process, determined by a particular historical epoch, is an innate material character natural to them, and eternally so, as it were, as elements of the production process.' (Marx 1993, 964)

<sup>218</sup> 'Capital for the capitalist is a perpetual pumping machine for surplus labour, land for the landowner a permanent magnet for attracting a part of the surplus-value pumped out by capital, and finally labour is the constantly self-renewing condition and means for the worker to obtain a part of the value he has produced, and hence a portion of the social product measured by this portion of value, his necessary means of subsistence, under the heading of wages.' (Marx 1993, 964)

proletariat. Finally, these revenue streams account for how labour is socially apportioned in these perverted forms of distribution. In the final third of the Trinity Formula Marx places this analysis as the culmination of *Capital*.

This is done by placing the Trinity Formula at the end of a summation of *Capital*. In the course of this summary Marx also accounts for the constitution and constituents of the fetish-characteristic forms of value and the mystifying appearance of capitalist society. Marx's summary makes an ambiguous use of the later term 'mystification': sometimes it means the mystified appearance generated by the complexity of capitalist production and circulation; sometimes it includes the properties of the fetish-characteristic forms of value, and sometimes it includes both.

Marx begins this summary by recalling his account of the constitution of the 'simple categories of the capitalist mode of production.' In this context 'the mystifying character'<sup>219</sup> mirrors his usage of fetish-characterisation which transforms 'social relations' into the 'properties' of things themselves (commodities), still more explicitly transforming the relation of production itself into a thing(money).<sup>220</sup> However, he then uses 'mystic' to exemplify mystification and fetish-characterisation, when he then goes on to point out how this 'bewitched and perverted world develops much further'<sup>221</sup> with relative surplus value causing capital to 'become[s] a very mystical being, since all the productive forces of social labour appear attributable to it, and not to labour as such, as a power springing forth from its own womb.'<sup>222</sup>

Marx's summary of this process of 'perversion' and 'bewitchment' moves to the 'actual process of production.' This process includes the perverted constitution of the fetish-characteristic forms of value with 'the relations of production becoming independent of one another and the components of value ossifying into independent forms.'<sup>223</sup> It also mystifies capital by making the 'threads of the inner connection get more and more lost.'<sup>224</sup> The latter occurs through a number of factors that Marx lays out whilst recalling his arguments in volume II and III in terms of the movement of his

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<sup>219</sup> This use of 'mystifying' signifies one of Marx's inconsistent uses of the term since: (a) he is using the term to describe what he elsewhere terms the fetish-characteristic properties, and because (b) this use of 'mystifying' differs from his other uses of mystification.

<sup>220</sup> (Marx 1993, 968)

<sup>221</sup> (Marx 1993, 968)

<sup>222</sup> (Marx 1993, 969)

<sup>223</sup> (Marx 1993, 969)

<sup>224</sup> (Marx 1993, 969)

presentation from capital to capitals, and of the circulation and valorisation of these capitals, which as a whole, ‘conceals the true nature of surplus-value more and more, concealing therefore the real mechanism of capital.’<sup>225</sup> At the same time these factors consist in the highest level (insofar as the Trinity Formula constitutes the apex of Marx’s account) of perversion and fetish-characterisation in the detachment of profit from exploitation, which ‘completes the autonomisation of the form of surplus-value, the ossification of its form as against its substance, its essence.’

This complete autonomisation culminates in the fetish-characteristic and mystifying properties of the Trinity Formula. In the case of interest-bearing capital: ‘If capital originally appeared on the surface of circulation as the capital fetish, value-creating value, so it now presents itself once again in the figure of interest-bearing capital as its most estranged and peculiar form.’<sup>226</sup> Whereas for land, since a part of the surplus-value ‘seems directly bound-up ...with a natural element’, this makes ‘the form, of mutual alienation and ossification of the various portions of surplus-value [...] complete.’<sup>227</sup> This leads to mystification, in which ‘the inner connection’ between these components is ‘definitively torn asunder and its source completely buried’ by their

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<sup>225</sup> (Marx 1993, 969)

<sup>226</sup> Marx describes the fetish-characteristic form of interest-bearing capital earlier in volume III as what amounts to the most autonomous form of fetishism. Interest-bearing capital consists in the ‘perversion and reification’ (*versachlichung*) of production relations in their highest degree. This ‘perversion’ makes the ‘the result of the entire process of reproduction appear as a property inherent in the thing itself.’ Interest-bearing capital possesses autonomous properties because it is self-valorising. Marx characterises these properties as the ‘automatic fetish (*fetisch*) of interest-bearing capital’ which consists in ‘self-expanding value’ in which ‘the social relation is consummated in the relation of a thing, of money, to itself’ in the form of ‘self-expanding value.’ This is because: (1) interest-bearing capital’s ‘continual existence’ as the ‘independent exchange-value’ of money abstracts its process of valorisation from the other forms of revenue it is reliant on, so that (2) the valorisation it generated through interest, as more money, ‘appears as an inherent part of it.’ The means that ‘as the growing process is to trees, so generating money, appears innate in capital in its form of money-capital.’ Consequently, ‘While interest is only a portion of the profit, i.e., of the surplus-value, which the functioning capitalist squeezes out of the labourer, it appears now, on the contrary, as though interest were the typical product of capital, the primary matter, and profit, in the shape of profit of enterprise, were a mere accessory and by-product of the process of reproduction.’ For a more in- depth discussion of the fetish-character of interest-bearing capital (see Schultz 2013).

<sup>227</sup> (Marx 1993, 969)

fetish-characteristic properties ('the assertion of their autonomy vis-à-vis each other.')

<sup>228</sup> As a result:

In capital-profit (or better still capital-interest), land-ground-rent, labour-wages, this economic trinity as the connection between the components of value and wealth in general and its sources, the mystification of the capitalist mode of production is completed, the reification of social relations, and the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity: the bewitched, back-to-front and upside-down world haunted by Monsieur Le Capital and Madame La Terre, who are at the same time social characters and mere things.<sup>229</sup>

These elements of the Trinity Formula as 'the configurations of appearance in which [...] the actual agents of production move and in which they are daily involved'<sup>230</sup> also marks the point at which Marx's analysis has reached its most concrete level. This is what Marx terms 'the religion of everyday life.' Unfortunately, the manuscript cuts off where Marx is preparing to go into more detail about how the 'autonomisation and ossification of the different social elements of wealth vis-à-vis one another, this personification of things and reification of the relations of production,'<sup>231</sup> are further embodied in the religion of everyday life.

From what is left of the section on the Trinity Formula we can see that it represents the culmination of Marx's analysis of the fetish-characteristics forms of value. Despite its fragmentary nature and problematic usage, the Trinity Formula also consists in Marx's most concrete analysis of the fetish-character in the perverted and upside down world of capital. Marx bases his analysis of the Trinity Formula on his argument from the first three volumes of *Capital*. This analysis thus brings together Marx's previous analysis of the different types of fetish-characteristic forms of value, and links the latter to the class relation and to the social allocation of labour. Finally, these elements add up to demonstrate how Marx's theory of fetishism is different from his theory of alienation. Marx's analysis in the Trinity Formula thus discloses

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<sup>228</sup> (Marx 1993, 969)

<sup>229</sup> (Marx 1993, 970)

<sup>230</sup> 'This is reflected in the fetishism of vulgar economists: It is equally natural, therefore, that vulgar economics, which is nothing more than a didactic and more or less doctrinaire translation of the everyday notions of the actual agents of production, giving them a certain comprehensible arrangement, finds the natural basis of its fatuous self-importance established beyond all doubt precisely in this trinity, in which the entire inner connection is obliterated.' (Marx 1993, 970, translated amended)

<sup>231</sup> (Marx 1993, 970)

how the fetish-characteristic forms of the concrete entities of rent, wages and capital are constituted by the socially specific form of capitalist production, and how these fetish-characteristic forms become the receptacles of labour allocation. It also shows how these forms are constitutive of social domination, which compels capitalists and landowners as personifications, and dominates proletarians who constitute and reproduce this perverted topsy-turvy world in order to survive.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary

In this chapter I focused on Marx's conception of fetishism and the role that it plays in his theory of the constitution and the constituents of social domination. I also (a) differentiated my focus on fetishism from the interpretations of fetishism as 'alienation' and fetishism as 'reification' that I covered in my literature review, and (b) presaged my subsequent comparative study of Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre through a detailed reading of Marx's work.

I begin by placing Marx's *early writings* in relation to his late work. In doing so I distinguished my interpretation of fetishism from Althusserian and classic Marxist Humanist interpretations of Marx. In contrast to: (1) the Althusserian interpretation I showed the continuity in Marx's conceptual structure of social domination; in contrast to (2) the classical Marxist humanist interpretation of fetishism as alienation I showed that Marx's theory of alienation differed with his theory of fetishism, because it (a) lacks the explanatory conceptions of abstract labour, capital, surplus value and Marx's monetary theory, and (b) because his constituent account of the social domination of alienated labour was premised on conceiving labour as an external alien thing, coupled to his account of the estrangement of human essence.

I then moved to demonstrate how Marx conceived of fetishism in his theory of the composition and properties of social domination. I began by defining how Marx conceived of the object and method of *Capital* and his theory of value. I then outlined how Marx's monetary theory of value conceived of capitalism as a socially specific: (a) class based form of labour distribution, and (b) as a collectively constituted form of social domination. I demonstrated the former with an overview of his form-analysis of money, commodities, the class relation and general formula of capital. I then

demonstrated that: (1) Marx's theory of fetishism provides an account of the social constitution of forms of value that integrates his form-analytic critique of political economy with the reification of persons and the personification of things; and that (2) What I have termed fetish-characteristic forms describe the autonomous and personified constituent properties of these forms of value that invert, dominate and compel individuals' action. In addition, I also showed (3) that Marx's account of these fetish-characteristic forms and their constituent domination proceeds from the commodity through money and capital (during the course of which these forms become more autonomous at the same time as their dominating properties become more concrete and socially embedded) and culminates in his presentation of the Trinity Formula, which provides an account of the constitution, the constituents and reproduction of the enchanted, perverted topsy-turvy world of capital.

This shows that *Capital* possesses the elements of Marx's conceptual structure of domination, in which Marx: (a) uses his critical-genetic method to account for the social constitution of capital by deriving it from the dynamic and contradictory process in which social labour appears and hides itself in the socially specific forms of value; (b) conceives of capital as constitutive of sensible-supersensible, alienated and inverted forms of abstract domination that are collectively constituted and reproduced by the socially specific type of social labour that appears in these forms of value. It also shows that the manner in which this is explicated differs from his account in *The Manuscripts*. In the first place, Marx provides a more sophisticated account in *Capital*, describing a form of social domination that includes abstract labour, surplus -value and his monetary theory of value. In the second place, rather than simply presenting a critique of the external alien thing, Marx's account of the constitutive properties of this mode of social domination is premised on his more sophisticated account of the necessarily reified social relations and fetish-characteristic personification of things that are collectively constituted by atomised production for exchange, and which invert and thereby coerce and govern the action of individuals on both sides of the class relation.

This demonstrates that Marx's conception of fetishism forms an inherent part of his theory of the constitution and constituents of this theory of capitalist social domination. It also points out that this theory of fetishism is more complex than the accounts of fetishism as alienation and reification. For rather than: (a) simply pointing out that capitalist production consists in workers being alienated from the things that they produce, or (b) that fetishism simply consists in social relations being transformed

into things, Marx's theory of fetish-characteristic forms explains how reified social relations constitute personified things that function autonomously to invert and govern individual behaviour. Finally, in contrast, to the accounts of fetishism and social domination that follow in this thesis, Marx's conception of fetishism and of its role in the constitution and constituents of his theory of social domination is more complex than a generalisation of the properties of commodity fetishism. Instead, his theory of fetishism articulates the constitution and constituent fetish-characteristic properties of more autonomous forms of value, alongside more complex and concrete accounts of their dominating properties. This concludes with Marx's most concrete analysis of reality in the perverted topsy-turvy world of the Trinity Formula, in which the fetishistic aspects of the Trinity Formula were derived from the socially specific character of capitalist social production. These fetishistic aspects were shown to form integral aspects of the constitution and reproduction of this mode of production, and to pertain to the distribution of surplus value and to the constitution of the autonomous and personified properties that these streams of value possess in their reliance upon the proletariat's reproduction of its own misery.

## 5.2 Evaluation

However, there are also important limitations and criticisms of Marx's theory of fetishism and its role in the construction and properties of his theory of social domination.

Firstly, it is important to stress the fragmentary and unfinished status of *Capital*. This is because Marx's mature critique of political economy does not consist in an unimpeachable science, nor does it consist in a magnum opus that demonstrates the iron laws of history. On contrary, his mature critique of political economy is an unfinished project: *Capital* consists of one volume with several different editions, and two volumes of assembled material, all of which were written at different points. These volumes are consequently fragmentary, and they also contain errors of assemblage that further this ambiguity (as we have seen in connection to the Trinity Formula).

This is also reflected in the ambiguities in Marx's theory, which vacillates between his monetary theory of value and the neo-Ricardian residues that remain in his writings. This can be seen in the ambiguous status of abstract labour, which is



presented with both physiological and social characteristics. It can also be seen in some of the shoddy scientific and religious metaphors that he uses to describe fetishism, as well as his choice of the words, which reflect and appear to describe practical abstraction. Finally, ambiguities are also noticeable in his presentation of money and the fetish-characteristic form of money, which depart from the coherent presentation of the form-analysis that he presented in the first edition of *Capital*. As a result, one cannot simply separate the complete and coherent theory of the ‘esoteric Marx’ from the ‘exoteric Marx.’<sup>232</sup>

In the second case it is important to consider how Marx’s conception of his object of study in *Capital*, as a model of capital at its ideal average, hinders an account of social domination in empirical reality. It is simply not the case that this ideal average analysed in *Capital* could be applied to the empirical reality of Marx’s day or to the empirical reality of today. One reason for this is that the empirical reality of how capital functions in capitalist society is bound to be messy and more complex than an ideal average.<sup>233</sup> Another reason is that Marx’s account of capital at its ideal average does not provide an account of how capital interacts with other elements of capitalist society, such as the state, and indeed refrains from describing how the following characteristics of capitalism are characteristic of capital’s function:

In presenting the reification of the relations of production and the autonomy they acquire vis-à-vis the agents of production, we shall not go into the form and manner in which these connections appear to them as overwhelming natural laws, governing them irrespective of their will, in the form that the world market and its conjunctures, the movement of market prices, the cycles of industry and trade and the alternation of prosperity and crisis prevails on them as blind necessity. This is because the actual movement of competition lies outside our plan, and we are only out to present the

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<sup>232</sup> The distinction between the ‘esoteric’ and ‘exoteric’ Marx was popularised by Backhaus and Reichelt to distinguish between the neo-Ricardian and monetary strands of Marx’s theory of value. This distinction has some overlap with the distinction between ‘traditional Marxism’ and the new reading of Marx. Whilst Backhaus and Reichelt originally claimed that the ‘esoteric’ Marx could be reconstructed and distinguished from the ‘exoteric’ Marx they later modified their view. Along with figures such as Heinrich and Arthur they now hold that there are ambivalences between the neo-Ricardian and monetary strands in Marx’s thought and that the latter need to be completed rather than simply be reconstructed. However, some commentators, like Postone, still hold to a similar distinction.

<sup>233</sup> Indeed as the school of self-identified ‘Political Marxism’ stresses, empirically real capitalist societies are complex entities that include non-capitalist elements, social complexity and variation. See (Banaji 2011; Gerstenberger 2011; Teschke 2009; E. M. Wood 2002)

internal organization of the capitalist mode of production, its ideal average, as it were.<sup>234</sup>

Thus, one cannot simply apply Marx's analysis directly to contemporary reality.

As a result, these ambiguities, orientations and omissions undermine the coherence of Marx's theory of fetishism and his theory of the social constitution and the constituents of social domination. They thus weaken the coherence and relevance of his critique of political economy.

Finally, in contrast to the accounts of Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre that we will go on to examine, Marx's ideal model does little to consider three areas; how the fetish-characteristic forms of capital are embedded in social and cultural forms; how these fetish-characteristic forms affect individuals and subjectivity and the epistemological repercussions of fetish-characteristic forms. It is these gaps that Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre will try to fill with the role that their respective interpretations of fetishism play in their theories of social domination. However, as I will also show, the manner in which each thinker constructs his theory differs from Marx's and this will be shown by extrapolating their theories of social domination from their respective interpretations of the fetish-character of commodities.

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<sup>234</sup> (Marx 1993, 960)

## **2. Lukács, Fetishism as Reification and his Social Theory of Dominating Mystification**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I turn to the work of Georg Lukács, and I look at the role played by the concept of fetishism within his theory of social domination. I then evaluate the coherence of the elements that compose the latter and discuss the way in which they inform it. In order to do so, I examine Lukács' theory of reification and treat it as being constitutive of an attempt, on Lukács own part, to extend Marxian theory, so as to enable it to account for important facets of contemporary socio-cultural reality that were not included within Marx's critique of political economy. These facets include institutions such as the state and bureaucracy, and particular modes of consciousness. In order to make his social theory pertain to these phenomena, Lukács, I will argue, based his theory of the constitution and constituent properties of reification on a distinctive double-faceted conception of commodity fetishism. This notion of fetishism fuses his Hegelian-Marxian and Simmelian-Weberian positions, and allows him to articulate a theory of fetishism and social domination which I will refer to here as the dominating mystification of his theory of reification.<sup>235</sup>

### **I. Literature on Lukács' accounts of Fetishism as Reification**

Following the typology outlined in the introduction to this thesis, much of the commentary on Lukács' conception of reification can be seen to fall into two principal

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<sup>235</sup> As I hope to show during the course of this chapter, because this double-faceted interpretation of fetishism informs Lukács theory of reification, there is no separation between the domination and mystification described in his theory nor is there a separation between Lukács' definition of fetishism and reification.

strands, insofar as the commentators concerned tend to either argue for or against continuity accounts of fetishism as ‘reification.’

## **1.2 Continuity**

The continuity account of fetishism as ‘reification’ conceives of a conceptual continuity between Marx’s account of fetishism and that of Lukács. On this view, fetishism and reification are treated interchangeably.<sup>236</sup> This account does not distinguish between what I have identified as Marx’s account of reified social relations and the fetish characterisation of things. Nor does this account interpret a conceptual distinction between Marx’s conception of fetishism and Lukács’ conception of reification. On the contrary, this account either: (a) stresses conceptual continuity between Marx and Lukács, on the grounds that fetishism is interpreted as reification;<sup>237</sup> (b) conceives Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism as the Marxian aspect of Lukács’ Weberian-Marxist theory of reification;<sup>238</sup> or (c) interprets fetishism and reification through the broad thematic lens of alienation.<sup>239</sup>

These interpretations are based on two key assumptions: firstly, that of conceiving Marx’s theory of fetishism as the transformation of social relations into a thing, and secondly that of viewing this conception of fetishism as the basis for Lukács’ theory of reification.<sup>240</sup> In some accounts these two points of continuity are added to a third: namely, that of conceiving Lukács’ account of reification as continuous with Marx’s theory of alienation.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> See (Vandenberghe 2009)

<sup>237</sup> See (Deborah Cook 1996)

<sup>238</sup> See (Lowy 1979; Honneth 2008; Wiggershaus 1995; Martin Jay 1986; Deborah Cook 2004)

<sup>239</sup> One prominent example of this can be found in Arato and Breines: ‘in Marx’s work it was in fact the notion of commodity fetishism, not a developed concept of alienation that enabled Lukács to see that the problematic of reification lies at the centre of Marxian critique.’ (Arato and Breines 1979, 115)

<sup>240</sup> See (Vandenberghe 2009)

<sup>241</sup> Arato and Breines provide an example that combines this conception of fetishism as reification with a conception of fetishism and reification as types of alienation: ‘From commodity fetishism, Lukács deduced a concept that, as a student of Simmel, he had been utilizing at least since 1910: the concept of the alienation of labour [...] Thus, Lukács deduces from ‘reification’ the notion of alienation.’ Arato and Breines 1979, 115) For examples of fetishism as the basis for reification see (Honneth 2008,

### 1.3 Discontinuity

The readings that argue for discontinuity conceive some type of conceptual divergence between Marx's conception of fetishism and Lukács' conception of reification. This reading is prominent in what I designated as the Althusserian<sup>242</sup> and Value-Form interpretations of fetishism. In addition, Lucio Colletti published several articles emphasising how Lukács' Hegelian conception of reification differs from that of Marx's;<sup>243</sup> Gillian Rose offers Neo-Kantian grounds for discontinuity;<sup>244</sup> Moishe Postone argues that Lukács's theory of reification is grounded on traditional Marxist preconceptions; finally, Lukács himself stresses elements of discontinuity between Marx and *History and Class Consciousness* in the 1967 preface to the latter text.

In these accounts, discontinuity is stressed between both Marx's and Lukács' conceptions of fetishism and their respective methodologies. The most prominent criticism in accounts of conceptual discontinuity identifies what Lukács himself described as a 'fundamental and crude error: confusing the Hegelian conception of objectification with Marx's conception of alienation.'<sup>245</sup> Althusser also criticises Lukács' conception of reification for: (a) focusing on thingness<sup>246</sup> and (b) its scope.<sup>247</sup>

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97), (Wiggershaus 1995, 80), (Jay 1986; Jay 1996, 189-190), (Deborah Cook 2004), (Dupree 1988) and (Grondin 1988)

<sup>242</sup> (Althusser 2005; Althusser and Balibar 2009; Balibar 2007)

<sup>243</sup> (Colletti 1973; Colletti 1989)

<sup>244</sup> (Rose 1979; Rose 1981)

<sup>245</sup> See (Lukács 1972, Xxiii-Xxiv) Curiously, Lukács's identification of this error seems to make its own case for a continuity account insofar as he does not distinguish reification, alienation or fetishism from each other.

<sup>246</sup> 'The whole, fashionable, theory of 'reification' depends on a projection of the theory of alienation found in the early texts, particularly the *1844 Manuscripts*, on to the theory of 'fetishism' in *Capital*. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, the objectification of the human essence is claimed as the indispensable preliminary to the re-appropriation of the human essence by man. Throughout the process of objectification, man only exists in the form of an objectivity in which he meets his own essence in the appearance of a foreign, non-human, essence. This 'objectification' is not called 'reification' even though it is called *inhuman*. Inhumanity is not represented *par excellence* by the model of a 'thing': but sometimes by the model of animality (or even of pre-animality - the man who no longer even has simple animal relations with nature), sometimes by the model of the omnipotence and fascination of transcendence (God, the State) and of money, which is, of course, a 'thing'. In *Capital* the only social relation that is presented in the form of a *thing* (this piece of metal) is *money*. But the conception of money as a *thing* (that is, the confusion of value with use-value in money) does not correspond to the reality of this 'thing': it is not the brutality of a simple 'thing' that man is faced with when he is in direct relation with money; it is a *power* (or a *lack* of it) over things and

Accounts of methodological discontinuity by authors such as Elbe and Postone stress the means by which Lukács's conception of reification is derived from and applied to a myriad of social and cultural phenomena and in a manner that differs from that of Marx.<sup>248</sup>

My criticisms of Lukács mirror some of these accounts. Prior to this, I will provide my own interpretation of Lukács's position. In doing so I distinguish myself from the literature outlined above by focusing on the way in which his distinct understanding of fetishism informs his theory of the composition and characteristic properties of his theory of reification. I argue that Lukács utilises a double-faceted interpretation of fetishism to articulate these aspects of his theory of reification. As this interpretation of fetishism is premised on replacing Marx's account of the abstract and autonomous properties of capitalist labour with the idea of social objectification as such, I argue that the first component of this interpretation is a view according to which fetishism arises through a process of objectification that separates subject from object. This process is reflected in the second component of Lukács' interpretation, which is the contention that these objects are transformed into things that possess the

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men. An ideology of reification that sees 'things' everywhere in human relations confuses in this category 'thing' (a category more foreign to Marx cannot be imagined) every social relation, conceived according to the model of a money-thing ideology.' (Althusser 2005, 230) For similar accounts of conceptual discontinuity between fetishism and reification see McBride in (Rockmore 1988) and (Markus 1982): 'Alienation and Reification in Marx and Lukács', *Thesis Eleven*, 5–6.

<sup>247</sup> 'In the capitalist mode of production it [fetishism] takes the form of the fetishism of commodities, i.e., the personification of certain things (money-capital) and the 'reification' of a certain relationship (labour). It does not consist of a general 'reification' of all relationships, as some humanist interpretations of Marx argue, but only of this particular relationship.' From Ben Brewster's Glossary in (Althusser and Balibar 2009, 313)

<sup>248</sup> 'In the 'founding document' of Western Marxism, Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* – which at least for the first time refers to the character of capitalist rule as understood by Marx: anonymous, objectively mediated, and having a life of its own – a reconstruction of Marx's theory of capitalism is avoided. Instead of an analysis of Marx's dialectic of the form of value up to the form of capital, which in the theory of real subsumption offers an explanation of the connection – so decisive for Lukács – between commodification and the alienated structure of the labour process, one finds merely an analogizing combination of a value theory reduced to the 'quantifying' value-form (due to an orientation towards Simmel's cultural critique of money) and a diagnosis, oriented towards Max Weber, of the formal-rational tendency of the objectification of the labour process and modern law.' (Elbe 2011) See also Lukács 1972)

fetishistic properties of false objectivity. I also argue that this interpretation provides a basis for Lukács' fusion of Hegel, Marx, Simmel and Weber in his account of the social constitution and constituent dominating and mystificatory properties of reified totality.<sup>249</sup>

I begin here by discussing the important role that *History and Class Consciousness* played in breaking with the Second International's interpretations of Marx. I then place that work in the context of Lukács' intellectual biography. I do so by focusing on how the early conception of dominating mystification that he formulated in his works of *Kultur Kritik* drew on Simmel and Weber. This will then lead me to demonstrate that Lukács' theorisations of fetishism as reification in *History and Class Consciousness* ground these Simmelian-Weberian concerns in his Hegelian Marxist framework.

In the next part of the chapter I then turn to this Hegelian Marxist framework. I use the essay 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' from *History and Class Consciousness* as a means of formulating his account of the social constitution and constituent properties of capitalist social reality. I argue that Lukács' interpretation consists in conceiving of capitalism through a Hegelian prism as an objectified dialectical social totality in which the subject is separated from the object on a practical and a theoretical level. To demonstrate this, I turn to Lukács's interpretation of fetishism. I show how Lukács's double-faceted interpretation of fetishism accounts for the practical and theoretical separation that occurs in this process of objectification. On his view, fetishism consists in the transformation of social processes into things. As fetishes, these things possess a false objectivity that dominates individuals by mystifying their content as objectified social entities. This conception of fetishism as 'thingification' leads Lukács to interpret fetishism as a pervasive theoretical phenomenon that is constitutive of non-Hegelian-Marxist methodologies and of everyday consciousness.

I then show how this conception of Hegelian Marxism allows Lukács to adapt his Simmelian and Weberian conception of mystified domination to his Hegelian Marxist framework, and to formulate his theory of reification. I argue that Lukács does this through his peculiar interpretation of commodity fetishism, which fuses the Hegelian-Marxist and Simmelian-Weberian strands of his thought. I then demonstrate

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<sup>249</sup> My use of the terms Hegelian-Marxian and Weberian-Simmelian is not intended as an assertion on my part of elective affinities or incompatibilities between these two thinkers. I simply intend this coupling to provide an indication of how two strands of Lukács' thought relied on fusing these thinkers in spite of theoretical incompatibilities.

how this interpretation of fetishism provides Lukács with a basis from which he is able to present the characteristic properties and composition of his theory of reification as a theory of dominating mystification that pertains to a multitude of objective and subjective, practical and theoretical social phenomena.

I will conclude this chapter by evaluating Lukács' theory of social domination in terms of some criticisms of how he interprets fetishism, the role it plays in his account of the constitution and constituent properties of reification and the general coherence of this theory.

## **2. Historical Context**

### **2.1 The Marxism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> international**

*History and Class Consciousness* is one of the most important works in twentieth-century Marxism. Much of this has to do with the historical context within which it appeared. Prior to its publication, Marx's writings had been codified into the variant of Marxism that grew out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International. This strand of Marxism fused the later writings of Engels and those of Marx into the scientific doctrine of dialectical materialism. In these interpretations, Marx and Engels provided a scientific insight into the 'iron laws' of history and nature. They also provided an alternative model of political economy that was based on a rigid conception of historical development and an economism based on a schematic dualism, according to which the 'base' determines the 'superstructure'.<sup>250</sup> The critical bent of Marx's critique of political economy was ignored and the categories that were central to Marx's critique of political economy – such as fetishism, abstract labour and the value form – received virtually no attention. *History and Class Consciousness* broke with this interpretation by offering a critical Hegelian conception of Marx's thought that drew on *Capital's* discussion of the fetishism of commodities, and which eschewed economism for a critique of the socio-cultural totality. Because of this, *History and Class Consciousness* was one of the first notable attempts to draw on Marxist categories in an attempt to extend Marx's analysis to the increasingly bureaucratised and rationalised capitalist society of the 1920s. Despite the specific purpose it was written for, and despite Lukács' later

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<sup>250</sup> For an extended discussion see 'Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International' in (Colletti 1989), (Kolakowski 1981)



misgivings about the work, its status as one of the founding documents of Western Marxism and its influence on several generations of thinkers thus stems from the context within which this innovative interpretation was received.

## 2.2. The early Lukács' theory of domination

However, the theory of reification presented in *History and Class Consciousness* did not simply emerge out of the blue following Lukács abrupt conversion to Marxism. As noted above, many accounts argue for continuity between the conceptions of fetishism advanced by Marx and Lukács, and indeed between their notions of reification and alienation.<sup>251</sup> In contrast to such readings, it is important to outline the early Lukács's conception of domination, as it contains parallels with aspects of Marx's theory of alienation whilst remaining conceptually distinct from the latter. This demonstration will also show that Lukács's early theory of domination finds its way into *History and Class Consciousness* via the Simmelian and Weberian aspect of his theory of reification.

Lukács' early conception of domination can be seen in his pre-Marxist works of *Kultur Kritik*. In these works, Lukács offers a variant of the latter, levelled at intertwined conceptions of society and culture. Like other variants of *Kultur Kritik*, Lukács' early work is based on an opposition between a neo-romantic conception of organic wholeness and its antithesis in contemporary socio-cultural forms.

Lukács's conception of social-cultural forms in these works was influenced by Georg Simmel's understanding of reification.<sup>252</sup> Simmel treated Marx's theory of fetishism as a 'special case' of the general 'tragedy of culture.'<sup>253</sup> In Colletti's words, the tragedy of culture was conceived: 'in the fact that the "forms" engendered by "life" are solidified into *objective institutions* separated from it', where 'these objective institutions

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<sup>251</sup> See (Vandenberghe 2009)

<sup>252</sup> Simmel uses the term *Verdinglichung* in *Philosophy of Money* several times. He does so more times than Marx does in *Capital*. For contrasting viewpoints on the etymology of *Verdinglichung* see (Frisby 1992 and Rose 1979)

<sup>253</sup> 'The 'fetishism' which Marx assigned to economic commodities represents only a special case of this general fate of contents of culture. With the increase in culture these contents more and more stand under a paradox: they were originally created by subjects and for subjects: but their intermediate form of objectivity, which they take on in addition to the two extreme instances, they follow an immanent logic of development. In so doing they estrange themselves from their origin as well as from their purpose.' (Simmel 2011)

acquire an autonomy of their own and set themselves over against the becoming that generated them originally.<sup>254</sup> Simmel's conception of reification thus shares two important characteristics with Lukács's early conception of domination: the conflation of alienated sociality with objectification,<sup>255</sup> and the subsequent conception of these reified forms as problems of the understanding,<sup>256</sup> thus rendering this conception of domination, as being dominated by mystifications of false objectivity, or rather by what I have termed dominating mystification.

Lukács's early conception of domination also features other aspects that will resurface in *History and Class Consciousness*. These include theorisations of: (1) society as second nature; (2) Weberian rationalisation;<sup>257</sup> (3) bourgeois subjectivity; (4) depersonalisation. All of these aspects of Lukács' early theory of dominating mystification can be seen in the following, which treats the rationalised, fragmented division of labour as analogous to the objectification of capitalist production; an objectification that is constitutive of an autonomous and rationalised form of domination that is external to the personality of individuals:

From the standpoint of the modern individual, the essence of the modern division of labour is perhaps that it makes work independent of the always irrational, thus only qualitatively determinable, capacities of the workers and places it under objective, goal-oriented criteria that lie outside of his personality and have no relationship to it. The major economic tendency of capitalism is this same objectification of production, its separation from the personality of the producers.<sup>258</sup>

As I will show, these aspects of Lukács' early theory of mystified social domination persist in what I will define as the Simmelian and Weberian strand of reification that can be discerned in *History and Class Consciousness*.<sup>259</sup> I will now turn to the conception of Hegelian Marxism that I will use as a framework for demonstrating how the Hegelian Marxist strand of his thought fits into his theory of reification.

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<sup>254</sup> (Colletti 1973, 169)

<sup>255</sup> (Frisby 1992, 95)

<sup>256</sup> (Frisby 1992, 169)

<sup>257</sup> See (Martin Jay 1986; Colletti 1989; Frisby 1992, Lowy 1979)

<sup>258</sup> Lukács, 'zur soziologie des modernen dramas', 665 cited in (Frisby 1992)

<sup>259</sup> This is not to refute *History and Class Consciousness* for being insufficiently Marxist. Rather it is to situate where certain elements Lukács introduces into Marxist theory stem from.

### 3. Lukács' Hegelian Marxism

Lukács' most extensive explication of his conception of Marxist theory in *History and Class Consciousness* can be found in the essay titled 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' This essay shows that Lukács understands Marxism as the method that deciphers capitalist social reality. It also demonstrates how he conceives of social constitution and constituent properties of capitalist reality in conjunction with fetishism. As I will now show, these facets of Lukács's theory rely on the way in which he interprets Marx's social theory through the Hegelian categories of dialectics and totality. I will then show how these categories form the basis for his account of the composition and characteristic properties of his double faceted interpretation of fetishism.

These elements of Lukács's conception of Marxist theory as the means for deciphering capitalist society can first be seen in his statement that 'Orthodox Marxism' refers 'exclusively to method' and in his support for 'the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth.'<sup>260</sup> As these statements indicate, Lukács's fusion of Marx and Hegel is central to this conception of Marxism. At the heart of this fusion lies the use of the Hegelian categories of dialectics and totality to conceive of capitalism as a dialectical socio-cultural totality. This is apparent in Lukács's interpretation of Marxist theory as the method that provides knowledge of the historical evolution of society and of the functioning of the capitalist totality. Marxist theory does this *through the dialectical method*: 'the function of theory is also to understand its own basis, i.e. dialectical method.'<sup>261</sup> For Lukács, 'This point is absolutely crucial.'<sup>262</sup>

The reason that this point is crucial is because Lukács conceives of the dialectical method as being constructive of history and capitalist social totality. He refers to this in Hegelian terminology as the 'dialectical relation between subject and object in the historical process.'<sup>263</sup> This means that the dialectical method grasps historical development. As a consequence, Lukács grasps capitalism's operation

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<sup>260</sup> (Lukács 1972, 1)

<sup>261</sup> (Lukács 1972, 3)

<sup>262</sup> (Lukács 1972, 3)

<sup>263</sup> (Lukács 1972, 3)

through a Hegelian prism as a dialectical totality that consists in the objectified separation between subject and object.

The interplay between the dialectical method and the category of totality is the means, according to Lukács, through which reality can be grasped. Like dialectics, totality serves a dual purpose in Lukács's thought. Since he asserts that the social-cultural-economic entity of capitalism functions as a totality, the methodological category of totality provides knowledge of capitalism. Totality and the dialectical method thus combine to provide a true knowledge of historical evolution and the dialectical function of capitalist totality.<sup>264</sup> For Lukács, totality is thus 'the only method capable of understanding and reproducing reality. Concrete totality is, therefore, the category that governs reality.'<sup>265</sup>

### **3.1 Lukács' Interpretation of Fetishism**

These Hegelian aspects of Lukács's conception of Marxist theory can be seen in more detail in the conception of fetishism advanced in 'What is Orthodox Marxism?'. There Lukács presents fetishism in relation to dialectics and totality, whilst contending that fetishism should be understood in terms of thingification in which parts of the objectified dialectical 'social process' of capitalist totality appear as things divorced from totality. As fetishes, these things possess a false objectivity that 'cloaks' the 'social processes' that constitute them. This means that fetishism is utilised as a double-faceted theory to articulate the social constitution of the thingified appearance of capitalist totality, in which practical activity is objectified, and in which it appears as a thing that possesses a false objectivity. By virtue of this conception, fetishism also becomes a general theoretical phenomenon, indicative of theoretical methods that try to understand capitalism and indeed the everyday consciousness of human agents; for both pertain to Lukács's attempts to understand capitalism on the basis of thingified appearance. These fetishes are dispersed by the orthodox Marxist method, which

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<sup>264</sup> 'All the isolated partial categories can be thought of and treated-in isolation-as something that is always present in every society. (If it cannot be found in a given society this is put down to "chance"- as the exception that proves the rule.) But the changes to which these individual aspects are subject give no clear and unambiguous picture of the real differences in the various stages of the evolution of society. These can really only be discerned in the context of the total historical process of their relation to society as a whole'. (Lukács 1972, 9-10)

<sup>265</sup> (Lukács 1972, 10)

provides a transparent grasp of capitalism as a social totality. In this we can see Lukács's account of the constitution and properties of these types of fetishism.

### **A) Methodological fetishism**

This first type of fetishism, which can be termed methodological fetishism, is evident in Lukács's critique of science. In this account, the scientific method is engendered by the fetishistic and fragmented outward appearance of capitalism constituted by the objectification – 'the reification of all human relations' – and fragmentation of totality: 'the constant expansion and extension of the division of labour.'<sup>266</sup> This appearance harmonises with specialisation and becomes the basis of scientific methodology. As a result, the objectified aspects of totality are conceived as 'things' that are independent of totality.<sup>267</sup>

Lukács' Hegelian conception of Marxist theory disperses these forms of methodological fetishism by theoretically relating subject to object, and can be seen to reveal the properties of these types of fetishes. This is because, in contrast to scientific methods of understanding, 'dialectics insists on the concrete unity of the whole.'<sup>268</sup> By doing so, dialectics 'exposes these appearances for the illusions they are – albeit illusions necessarily engendered by capitalism.'<sup>269</sup> For this to happen, it is first necessary that dialectics recognises these 'things' as forms of appearance 'in which the inner core necessarily appears.' For, (a) 'the simultaneous recognition and transcendence of immediate appearances is precisely the dialectical nexus', and (b) 'Only in this context

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<sup>266</sup> (Lukács 1972, 6)

<sup>267</sup> 'The fetishistic character of economic forms (*fetischistische* character), the reification of all human relations, the constant expansion and extension of the division of labour which subjects the process of production to an abstract, rational analysis, without regard to the human potentialities and abilities of the immediate producers, all these things transform the phenomena of society and with them the way in which they are perceived. In this way arise the 'isolated' facts, 'isolated' complexes of facts, separate, specialist disciplines (economics, law, etc.) whose very appearance seems to have done much to pave the way for such scientific methods. It thus appears extraordinarily 'scientific' to think out the tendencies implicit in the facts themselves and to promote this activity to the status of science.' (Lukács 1972, 6)

<sup>268</sup> (Lukács 1972, 5)

<sup>269</sup> (Lukács 1972, 6)

which sees the isolated facts of social life as aspects of the historical process and integrates them in a *totality*, can knowledge of the facts hope to become knowledge.<sup>270</sup>

Methodological fetishism therefore consists in methodological presuppositions of specialisation and formal rationality, which, as premised on the thingified appearance generated by the reification of all human relations and the division of labour that transforms these social processes into a thing-like appearance, provides a fragmented orientation towards totality. From this perspective, the dialectical ‘social processes’ of totality cannot be grasped, and objects are conceived as things detached from the processes that objectify them. This orientation fetishises disciplines and methodological approaches as isolated things, and provides them with a false objectivity that cloaks their place as aspects of totality. Such a juxtaposition can also be seen in Lukács’s deployment of the conception of fetishism which he associates with everyday human agents within capitalism.

## **B) Everyday Fetishism**

Lukács’s reliance on a conception of what might be termed ‘everyday fetishism’<sup>271</sup> demonstrates the importance of his interpretation of Marxism as a method that discloses the constitution, domination and reproduction of the capitalist totality. This is because the ultimate validity of this method ‘only emerges with complete clarity’ when ‘we direct our attention to the real, material substratum of our method, viz. capitalist society with its internal antagonism between the forces and the relations of production.’<sup>272</sup> In Lukács’s Hegelian interpretation of Marx’s theory of fetishism, everyday conceptions of capitalism rest on the latter’s immediate appearances, and fail to grasp the material substratum of the class relation that constitutes this objectified, thingified appearance. The Marxist method, however, for Lukács, by virtue of its dialectical apprehension of totality, can grasp this substratum.<sup>273</sup> This knowledge of totality dissolves the fetishistic conceptions held by everyday agents in capitalism in a two-fold manner: firstly by dissolving the assumption that capitalism is a natural, and not an historical entity; and secondly, by dissolving the fetishised

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<sup>270</sup> (Lukács 1972, 8)

<sup>271</sup> As I indicate below, this is because everyday fetishism is indicative of ‘the objective forms of all social phenomena.’ (Lukács 1972, 10)

<sup>272</sup> (Lukács 1972, 10)

<sup>273</sup> See (Lukács 1972, 4)

appearance of capitalism.<sup>274</sup> As a result, it also discloses how Lukács conceives the composition and characteristic properties of these types of fetishism.

In a further instance of Lukács's Hegelian interpretation of Marx's theory of fetishism, the naturalisation of capitalism is shown to occur because people's everyday perceptions do not grasp how or why capitalism functions as a dialectical social totality. As a result, the thingified appearance of capitalist society generates the conception that it is natural: 'With the totality out of the way, the fetishistic relations [*Erscheinen*] of the isolated parts appear as a timeless law valid for every human society.'<sup>275</sup> The Marxist theoretical method de-naturalises these trans-historical assumptions. Capital's fetishistic forms of objectivity are derived from its immediate appearances and they generate the assumption that capitalism is in some sense 'natural'; yet the dialectical method links these immediate forms of appearance together, and reveals their basis within the historically rooted substratum that they serve to veil. This reflects the degree to which Lukács conceives capitalist totality as a social process:

[...] the objective forms of all social phenomena change constantly in the course of their ceaseless dialectical interactions with each other. The intelligibility of objects develops in proportion as we grasp their function in the totality to which they belong. This is why only the dialectical conception of totality can enable us to understand *reality as a social process*. For only here the fetishistic forms of objectivity that capitalist production necessarily produces dissolve themselves into a necessarily recognized [understood, perceived, grasped] appearance – an appearance that nevertheless remains an illusion [translation of this sentence amended]. These unmediated concepts, these 'laws' sprout just as inevitably from the soil of capitalism and veil the real relations between objects. They can all be seen as ideas necessarily held by the agents of the capitalist system of production [...] Only when this veil is torn aside does historical knowledge become possible. For the function of these unmediated concepts that have been derived from the fetishistic [*fetischistischen*] forms of objectivity is to make the phenomena of capitalist society appear as supra- historical essences. The knowledge of the real, objective nature of a phenomenon, the knowledge of its historical character and the knowledge of its actual function in the totality of society form, therefore, a single, undivided act of cognition.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> By doing so, this conception of everyday fetishism fuses Marx's conceptions of the political economists' fetishistic naturalisation of capitalism with Marx's contention that the fetish character of commodities is indicative of the social character of capitalist production.

<sup>275</sup> (Lukács 1972, 14)

<sup>276</sup> Lukács 1972, 14) As noted, I amended the translation of a crucial sentence in this paragraph. Livingstone translates it as 'For only this conception dissolves the fetishistic forms [*fetischistischen*] necessarily produced by the capitalist mode of production and

Lukács' discussion of necessary forms of illusion in this passage can be taken to indicate that he would interpret the fetish forms of objectivity as an objective or necessary illusion; as an illusion that cannot be dissolved merely through the generation of knowledge about totality, but only through the practical overthrow of the capitalist totality itself. Yet directly after this passage, Lukács treats the fetish character of commodities as a form of thingified objectivity that veils the class relation that constitutes capitalist production and as something that can be dispersed by criticism. As was the case with the other types of fetishism, i.e., that of the fetishism of economic categories and of the human environment, this immediacy is conceived in terms of things that possess a false objectivity which conceals the social relations embedded in them:

The fetishistic illusions [*fetischistischen*] enveloping all phenomena in capitalist society succeed in concealing reality, but more is concealed than the historical, i.e. transitory, ephemeral nature of phenomena. *This* concealment is made possible by the fact that in capitalist society man's environment and especially the categories of economics appear to him immediately and necessarily in forms of objectivity which conceal the fact that they are the categories of the *relations of men with each other*. Instead they appear as things and the relations of things with each other. Therefore, when the dialectical method destroys the fiction of the immortality of the categories it also destroys their reified character and clears the way to a knowledge of reality.<sup>277</sup>

These fetishistic categories are consequently 'destroyed' by dialectical knowledge of the social relations that mediate the relation between things, as this provides transparent insight into the capitalist totality: 'It is by virtue of this insight that the dialectical method and its concept of totality can be seen to provide real knowledge of what goes on in society.'<sup>278</sup> As a consequence, this dialectical knowledge of totality provides a description of how Lukács construes the social relations that underlie it. Lukács' description of these social relations provides an account of social

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enables us to see them as mere illusions [*erkannten Schein*] which are not less illusory [*Schein*] for being seen to be necessary.' In my view, Livingstone's translation (1) neglects Lukács's designation of this type of fetishism as fetish forms of false objectivity, and this leads to (2) neglecting the importance of Lukács's designation of the illusory properties of these fetish forms of false objectivity as *erkannten Schein*, thereby (3) introducing an unwarranted distinction between illusion and mere illusion.

<sup>277</sup> (Lukács 1972, 15)

<sup>278</sup> (Lukács 1972, 15)



domination and the social constitution of capitalism that is premised upon his Hegelian, Orthodox Marxist method. The first point can be seen in his description of the practical constitution of these objectified forms of false objectivity in which ‘the inner logic of the movement of human society can be understood at once as the product of men themselves and of forces that arise from their relations with each other and which have escaped their control.’<sup>279</sup> The second point is evident in his account of the dialectical function of capitalism as a totality that is constituted by human social relations:

As ‘pure’ economic categories they are involved in constant interaction with each other, and that enables us to understand any given historical cross-section through the evolution of society. But since they have arisen out of human relations and since they function in the process of the transformation of human relations, the actual process of social evolution becomes visible in their reciprocal relationship with the reality underlying their activity. That is to say, it is the production and reproduction of a particular economic totality.<sup>280</sup>

We can now see the distinct configuration of Lukács’s Hegelian Marxism. Marxism is seen as constitutive of a critical-dialectical method that grasps the movement of history and the function of capitalist society as a dialectical social totality. Rather than providing a fully explicated theory of social constitution, this ‘method’ tends to: (a) presuppose that capitalism functions as a dialectical social totality without offering a detailed explication of how it actually functions in that regard; (b) defines the basis of the constitution of this totality by resorting to the Marxian terminology of relations between people and class relations, but without a detailed explanation of what these relations are, or indeed of how they constitute totality; (c) tends to fall back on a ‘Hegelian’ conception of the historical evolution of society as the interaction between subject and object, and on an account of objectification as the ground for a conception of social dynamics.

We can also see how this distinct configuration conceives of fetishism in the dual capacity of a theory that articulates how the dialectical social relations of capitalist totality (a) constitute objectified thing-like appearances, and (b) are constitutive of types of understanding that rest on these immediate appearances, and which thus engender a failure to grasp capitalism as a dialectical totality. Fetishism is thus

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<sup>279</sup> (Lukács 1972, 15)

<sup>280</sup> (Lukács 1972, 14)

interpreted as problem of ‘thingification’ that generates a false objectivity that cloaks the real ‘social processes’ that are objectified in them. Instead of consisting in an aspect of a theory of the constitution of abstract social domination that explains the role that personified things play in the social constitution and reproduction of capitalist social production, Lukács’s conception of fetishism in his theory of social domination is thus concerned with objectification *per se*.<sup>281</sup> In the above examples, theoretical instances of fetishism are consequently conceived as forms of thingified false objectivity that is characteristic of scientific and everyday forms of understanding.

As a result, Methodological Fetishism consists of types of understanding, such as science, that are methodologically deficient. Lukács’s interpretation of commodity fetishism, on the other hand, bases itself on the confusion of objectification and the abstract and autonomous social character of capitalist labour, and thereby conceives fetishism as a naturalisation fallacy, and thus as an epistemological illusion of thingification that serves to veil the underlying class relations of capitalist totality. Yet where ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ deploys these concepts in connection to a theoretical account of the constitution and constituent, thingified appearance of social reality, something rather different can be found in his ‘Reification and the Class Consciousness of the Proletariat’. In the latter essay, these concepts are used as means of *describing* the constitution and the constituent dominating and mystificatory elements of capitalist dialectical social totality. In the latter essay, as I will now show, Lukács utilises his interpretation of commodity fetishism to fuse the Simmelian-Weberian and Hegelian-Marxian strands of his thought, employing it as a basis upon which he formulates his theory of the dominating mystification of reification.

#### 4. Reification

*Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* is a dense essay. Whilst many commentators have provided an exposition of the work and traced its disparate influences,<sup>282</sup> I will focus on *how* Lukács’s Hegelian interpretation of Marx and his distinct interpretation of commodity fetishism grounds the theory of reification. I then

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<sup>281</sup> In this sense it is Lukács’s conflation of alienation with objectification that fuses his Hegelian-Marxian conception of domination with the Simmelian-Weberian strand of his thought.

<sup>282</sup> See (Andrew Arato 1979; Vandenberghe 2009)

examine how the Hegelian-Marxist and Simmelian, Weberian aspects of his conception of social domination and mystification are constitutive of this interpretation of commodity fetishism as a theory of the dominating mystification of objectified capitalist totality. I will then turn to Lukács' notion of the destruction of reification, as the crucial conception of de-reification that he presents there can be seen to reveal his views on the constitution of reification.

The extent to which Lukács's Hegelian Marxism informs his conception of reification can be seen in the introductory paragraph of the 'Reification' essay. In this paragraph, Lukács lays out his conception of Marx's analysis of capitalist society. This reflects the elements of Lukács's Hegelian Marxism discussed above, and it also demonstrates that Lukács is utilising his conception of Marxism as the basis for his social analysis of reification. This can be seen in his statement that Marx used the category of totality critically, and as a means to 'portray capitalist society in its totality [by] lay[ing] bare its fundamental nature.'<sup>283</sup>

The central importance that Lukács's interpretation of commodity fetishism holds in the 'Reification' essay is also signalled in his statement that Marx's critical analysis of totality is primarily based on his analysis of commodities, for 'there is no problem', in Lukács's view, 'that does not ultimately lead back to that question and there is no solution that could not be found in the solution of the riddle of the commodity form.'<sup>284</sup> This is mirrored later in the essay when Lukács states that 'it might be claimed [...] that the chapter dealing with the fetish character of the commodity contains within itself the whole of historical materialism and the whole self-knowledge of the proletariat seen as the self-knowledge of capitalist society.'<sup>285</sup> As a result, the commodity form is defined as 'the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects' and thus as the basis of Lukács's dialectical social analysis of capitalist totality; it is presented as 'yield[ing] a model of all the objective forms of bourgeois society together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them.'<sup>286</sup>

These two elements are drawn on in the beginning of the essay, where Lukács provides a basis for his analysis of the constitution and constituent properties of reified totality in his definition of the commodity form. It is important to note that the

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<sup>283</sup> (Lukács 1972, 83)

<sup>284</sup> (Lukács 1972, 15)

<sup>285</sup> (Lukács 1972, 170)

<sup>286</sup> (Lukács 1972, 15)

definition that Lukács provides of the commodity form is equivalent to his conception of fetishism and to his later definition of the basic phenomena of reification.<sup>287</sup> This definition can also be seen to link his Hegelian-Marxian and Simmelian-Weberian strands of thought with the dual conception of fetishism that articulates his views on the composition and characteristic properties of capitalist totality. This is done in Lukács's definition of the commodity form, in which we can see (1) his Hegelian-Marxian conception of fetishism as the autonomous thingified false objectivity of 'phantom objectivity'; (2) his Simmelian and Weberian conception of reification as autonomy, which is premised on a formal rationality that cannot grasp its own content; (3) that he bases the constitution and the constituent properties of these two facets on the mode of objectification that takes place within a social relation between people that takes on *the character of a thing*, and which thereby veils the social relations that constitute it. Thus:

The essence of commodity-form [translation amended] has often been pointed out. Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.<sup>288</sup>

This distinctive interpretation of the commodity becomes a basis for Lukács' analysis of the constituent properties of reified social totality in three ways. In the first place, Lukács provides several historical arguments for the pervasiveness of commodification. In the second place, his ensuing definition of reification is equivalent to this definition. In the third place, his subsequent analysis draws on these elements to catalogue the pervasive reification of capitalist totality.

This first element of this connection between Lukács's views on the commodity and his account of totality provides a historical basis for the pervasiveness of commodification that he presents in a number of statements, which periodise the

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<sup>287</sup> Lukács uses the terms commodity form, fetishism and reification interchangeably. This is particularly noticeable in the use of Marx quotations in which Lukács: (a) omits Marx's only use of the term reification (*verdinglichung*) from the passage of the Trinity Formula that he quotes; (b) uses several of Marx's discussions of different types of fetishism including the passage where Marx defines the fetish-character of commodities to define reification. Rose (1979) also points out that Lukács uses Marx's definition of the fetish-character of commodities for the basis of his definition of reification. Frisby (1992) also points out that Lukács omits Marx's one use of the term *verdinglichung*.

<sup>288</sup> (Lukács 1972, 83)

historically specific and all-encompassing extent of commodification. In these remarks, Lukács draws on his initial comments about the commodity as the central, structural problem of capitalist society by distinguishing the capitalist society he is analysing from earlier forms of capitalism, and from other modes of production. Consequently, he asserts that 'commodity fetishism is a *specific* problem of [...] the age of modern capitalism'.<sup>289</sup> This is because, in contrast to previous forms of capitalism, commodities are only 'constitutive' of society when 'the commodity structure' has 'penetrat[ed] society in all its aspects and [...] remould[ed] it in its own image.' As a result, the 'universal structuring principle' of commodification possesses pervasive dialectical properties:

The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it.<sup>290</sup>

The second element listed above pertains to Lukács's definition of the basic phenomena of reification. The definition that Lukács provides consists of a citation of the passage where Marx defines the fetish character of commodities<sup>291</sup> – not, it might be added, the passage in which Marx discusses the phenomena of the objectification of persons and reified social relations – and omits Marx's use of the term fetishism. This definition thus treats fetishism as reification. As I will show, this is equivalent to Lukács's earlier definition of the commodity form.

I will make this case by turning now to the third element of the connection between Lukács's view of the commodity and his conception of social totality. This third element is the analysis of reified totality that proceeds from this definition of fetishism as reification. The problematic equivalence between fetishism, reification and

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<sup>289</sup> (Lukács 1972, 84)

<sup>290</sup> (Lukács 1972, 83)

<sup>291</sup> 'A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses [...] It is only a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.' (Lukács 1972, 85)

Lukács's initial definition of the commodity form already signalled in Lukács statement that his 'intention' is to 'base' his analysis of reification on 'Marx's economic analyses and to proceed from there to a discussion of the problems growing out of the fetish character of commodities, both as an objective form and also as a subjective stance corresponding to it.'<sup>292</sup> As I will show, the ensuing account of reification generalises the properties of his unique analysis of the commodity form *qua* fetishism as reification to: (a) the practical forms of reification constitutive of the objectified separation between subject and object that occur in the process of thingification; and (b) the theoretical elements of reified consciousness which are reflective of the objectified separation between subject and object in their correspondence to thingified appearance.

#### 4.1 Practical Reification

This can first be seen in the Hegelian-Marxist strand of the practical forms of reification. This aspect of reification draws on the conceptions of 'autonomy' and 'phantom objectivity' signalled in his definition of the commodity form. In these passages Lukács can also be seen to draw out the repercussions that this autonomy has on human individuals.

The constituent properties of this Hegelian-Marxian conception of reification are first drawn out in Lukács's characterisation of the basic phenomena of reification, which is indicative of his equivalent treatment of: his initial definition of the commodity form; his definition of fetishism as reification; and his interpretation of fetishism *qua* objectification. This is evident in Lukács's statement that 'what is of central importance' to Marx's definition of commodity fetishism 'is that because of this situation a man's own activity, his own labour becomes something objective and independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man.'<sup>293</sup>

The characteristic properties of this 'basic phenomenon' of reification are illustrated by Lukács in a dialectical manner that also highlights this aspect of Lukács' interpretation of fetishism. This is apparent when Lukács stresses that it is a world of objects as such that is indicative of this practical form of reification: 'a world of objects and relations between things springs into being.' It is further evident in his description

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<sup>292</sup> (Lukács 1972, 85)

<sup>293</sup> (Lukács 1972, 86)

of how the ‘phantom objectivity’ of these objects ‘confront’ individuals as ‘invisible forces that generate their own power’<sup>294</sup>, estranging individuals from their own activity and compelling them to act in an instrumental manner.

Finally, these Hegelian-Marxist aspects of the constituent properties of the practical forms of reification can be seen in Lukács’s further elucidation of the dialectical repercussions of abstract labour. Objectively, abstract labour grants different objects their commodity nature by ‘facilitating the equal exchange of qualitatively different objects.’<sup>295</sup> Subjectively, what Lukács terms the ‘formal equality’ of abstract labour ‘becomes the real principle governing the actual production of commodities.’<sup>296</sup> As a result, the Hegelian-Marxian elements of Lukács’s definition of the commodity form as the autonomous fetishism of thingified false objectivity are reflected in the constituent properties of ‘abstract labour’ which ‘becomes a category of society that decisively influences the objective form of things, including the movements of people within society, their relation to nature, and their possible relations of men with each other.’<sup>297</sup>

In order to demonstrate how abstract labour attains and exerts this influence, Lukács moves to production in the factory. Here, Lukács can be seen to draw on the Simmelian and Weberian aspects of his definition of the commodity form in his ‘strictly rational and all-embracing’ analysis of the objectified forms of reification that are constitutive of the pervasive rationalisation of human activity in reified totality. As was the case in his earlier work, this Simmelian and Weberian conception of reification is premised on: (a) his conflation of alienation and objectification and (b) an opposition between the pernicious effects of the quantified and fragmented rationalisation of the division of labour and a qualitative notion of wholeness.

From this it follows that Lukács’s initial discussion of production in the factory is constitutive of practical properties of reification that derive from the fact that such production is rationalised in fragmented, quantified and calculated activities. This transforms the products of the process of production into autonomous objects – ‘the finished article ceases to be the object of the work-process’<sup>298</sup> – because it is

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<sup>294</sup> (Lukács 1972, 87)

<sup>295</sup> (Lukács 1972, 87)

<sup>296</sup> (Lukács 1972, 87)

<sup>297</sup> (Lukács 1972, 88)

<sup>298</sup> (Lukács 1972, 88)

generated by the fragmented division of labour in the act of production and based on an opposition to a neo-romantic conception of organic production.<sup>299</sup>

These Simmelian and Weberian aspects are also reflected in Lukács's account of the subjective aspect of rationalisation which fragments the subject who takes on a contemplative stance towards its own activity. This entails the 'mechanically objectified performance of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality',<sup>300</sup> so that this 'rational mechanisation extends right into the workers soul', where 'even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality because 'they are placed in opposition to it so as to facilitate their integration into specialised rational systems and their reduction to statistically viable concepts.'<sup>301</sup> This causes the transformation of the 'basic categories of man's immediate attitude to the world',<sup>302</sup> which Lukács also accounts for in terms of an opposition between quantity and quality. Time is transformed into quantitative space; human labour power is objectified 'into something opposed to their total personality', and holistic community is replaced by mechanisation.

This analysis of the rationalisation of the factory forms the basis for the generalisation of this Simmelian and Weberian account of reification to other socio-cultural forms. This can be seen in the analogies that Lukács draws between the characteristics of reification that he has developed in his preceding analysis of the factory, and other social institutions. This generalisation is based on the contention

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<sup>299</sup> 'The latter turns into the objective synthesis of rationalised special systems whose unity is determined by pure calculation and which must therefore seem to be arbitrarily connected with each other. This destroys the organic necessity with which inter-related special operations are unified in the end-product. The unity of a product as a *commodity* no longer coincides with its unity as a use-value: as society becomes more radically capitalistic the increasing technical autonomy of the special operations involved in production is expressed also, as an economic autonomy, as the growing relativisation of the commodity character of a product at the various stages of production'. (Lukács 1972, 89)

<sup>300</sup> (Lukács 1972, 90)

<sup>301</sup> (Lukács 1972, 8)

<sup>302</sup> (Lukács 1972, 90)

Thus despite Lukács's contention that there is continuity between his earlier discussion of the autonomisation of commodities and abstract labour on the one hand, and his discussion of autonomisation and rationalisation on the other, there is nonetheless incommensurability. This is because while in Marx's account the autonomisation of objects is premised on the social division of labour, in Weber's it is premised on the division of labour within specific factories. One does not necessarily relate to the other.



that since 'the laws of capitalist production have been extended to cover every manifestation of life', the 'factory contains the concentrated structure of society.' From this it follows that 'the fate of the worker is typical of society as a whole', in that 'self-objectification', and the 'transformation of a human function into a commodity' reveals in all its starkness the dehumanised and dehumanising function of the commodity relation.<sup>303</sup> Therefore because the commodity is the universal structuring principle of totality in Lukács's account, '[c]apitalism has created a form for the state and a system of law corresponding to the needs and harmonising with its own structure.'<sup>304</sup>

Such a 'harmony' is demonstrated by recourse to the Simmelian and Weberian strand of reification. The institutions of the state and bureaucracy are said to possess a 'rational systemisation'<sup>305</sup> that is analogous to the organisation of the factory. This rational systemisation eschews qualitative factors to consist in formal, quantitative, fragmented and standardised organisation.<sup>306</sup> These forms of 'rational systemisation' 'confront' individuals, instilling a contemplative attitude within them, and also engender their estrangement from their own activity and from their own instrumental behaviour. Thus, not only are people's actions objectified and rationalised; so too is their consciousness. Examples of this include bureaucracy and law, the properties of which are analogous to the factory in that they imply 'the adjustment of one's way of life, mode of work and hence of consciousness, to the general socio-economic premises of the capitalist economy.'<sup>307</sup> This is seen as being so pervasive throughout capitalist totality that it also extends to other occupations and social customs, including journalists, marriage, and specialists who are 'the living embodiment of such tendencies'.<sup>308</sup> As a result: 'the formal standardisation of justice, the state, the civil service, etc. signifies objectively and factually, a comparable search for the rational formal laws of these carefully segregated partial systems', while, subjectively, the 'divorce between work and the individual capacities and needs of the worker

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<sup>303</sup> (Lukács 1972, 92)

<sup>304</sup> (Lukács 1972, 95)

<sup>305</sup> (Lukács 1972, 96)

<sup>306</sup> (Lukács 1972, 92)

<sup>307</sup> (Lukács 1972, 98)

<sup>308</sup> (Lukács 1972, 103)

produces' the 'comparable effects upon the consciousness' of an 'inhuman, standardised division of labour.'<sup>309</sup>

These Hegelian-Marxian and Weberian-Simmelian strands of practical reification are brought together in Lukács' comments on the 'natural laws' and crisis-prone tendencies of reified totality. The former and the later are accounted for in terms of the relationship between the rationalised parts and the irrational whole.<sup>310</sup> This relationship is indicative of the 'true structure of society', where 'independent, rationalised and formal partial laws whose links with each other are of necessity purely formal (i.e. their formal interdependence can be formally systematised),' can 'only establish fortuitous connections.'<sup>311</sup> Therefore, 'It is evident that the whole structure of capitalist production rests on the interaction between a necessity subject to strict laws in all isolated phenomena and the relative irrationality of the total process.'<sup>312</sup> Thus, on one hand the Weberian-Simmelian strand of Lukács's theory consists in the rationalised parts of capitalist totality in which the practical activity of society is carried out in accordance with partial laws that ultimately help to reproduce this society.

The capitalist process of rationalisation based on private economic calculation requires that every manifestation of life shall exhibit this very interaction between details which are subject to laws and a totality ruled by chance. It presupposes a society so structured. It produces and reproduces this structure in so far as it takes possession of society.<sup>313</sup>

It also means, on the other hand, that the Hegel-Marxian strand of Lukács's theory reflects the function of the irrational whole which is exemplary of a 'law' that is collectively constituted by the 'unconscious product of the activity of the different commodity owners acting independently of one another'<sup>314</sup> As a result,

This irrationality, this-highly problematic-'systematisation' of the whole which diverges *qualitatively and in principle* from the laws regulating the parts, is more than just a

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<sup>309</sup> (Lukács 1972, 99)

<sup>310</sup> This rationalisation of the world appears to be complete. It seems to penetrate the very depths of man's physical and psychic nature. It is limited, however, by its own formalism. That is to say, the rationalisation of isolated aspects of life results in the creation of formal laws. (Lukács 1972, 102)

<sup>311</sup> (Lukács 1972, 102)

<sup>312</sup> (Lukács 1972, 101)

<sup>313</sup> (Lukács 1972, 102)

<sup>314</sup> (Lukács 1972, 102)

postulate, a pre-supposition essential to the workings of a capitalist economy. It is at the same time the product of the capitalist division of labour.<sup>315</sup>

As such, Lukács's account of the constituent properties of the practical forms of his theory of reification can be seen to draw on his Hegelian-Marxian account of the autonomous thingified properties of social activity and his Simmelian and Weberian conception of the rational and all-embracing autonomy of the rationalised production process. Both rest on his conception of objectified separation and are premised on his definition of the commodity fetish. These two aspects of Lukács thought are synthesised in the rationalised, autonomous function of totality. As I will now show, Lukács account of the theoretical stances that correspond to these practical forms of reification also draws on this definition.

## 4.2 Theoretical Reification

This is because the theoretical elements of the constitutive properties of reification are premised on the objectified separation of subject and object. These theoretical stances consequently rest on the thingified appearance of a fetishised social totality that conceals the social relations that constitute it. This theoretical aspect of reified consciousness is so pervasive that 'even the individual object which man confronts directly, either as a producer or consumer, is distorted in its objectivity by its commodity character.'<sup>316</sup> As a consequence it can be seen in the several types of theoretical subjectivity that Lukács outlines. These types can also be seen to reflect the theoretical accounts of fetishism in 'What is Orthodox Marxism?'

What Lukács calls the 'reified mind' is indicative of this theoretical element of reification. This 'reified mind' sees 'the commodity character of the commodity, the abstract, quantitative mode of calculability' as the form in which its own authentic immediacy becomes manifest, and, as reified consciousness, it does not even attempt to transcend it. Instead, the reified mind tries to perpetuate and 'scientifically deepen it.' For Lukács, 'the reified mind' is indicative of 'bourgeois attempts to comprehend the ideological phenomenon of reification.'<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> (Lukács 1972, 103)

<sup>316</sup> (Lukács 1972, 93)

<sup>317</sup> (Lukács 1972, 95)

This theoretical element of reification is also characteristic of Lukács's criticism of the scientific method. This criticism fuses his discussion of Weberian rationalisation with his conception of methodological fetishism in 'What is Orthodox Marxism?'. In this respect, the rationalised specialisation of skills 'leads to the destruction of every image of the whole.'<sup>318</sup> While Lukács's criticism of the scientific method in which 'its own concrete underlying reality lies, methodologically and in principle, beyond its grasp'<sup>319</sup> repeats his earlier criticism of methodological fetishism in 'What is Orthodox Marxism?'. There he claimed that the scientific method cannot grasp totality. Finally, bureaucracy and jurisprudence are seen to involve this theoretical element of reification because they are based on analogous types of formal rationality that fail to grasp their own content.

These elements of the theoretical component of reification are also present in Lukács's longer discussion of the antinomies of bourgeois thought, which he presents in the second section of the 'Reification' essay. In this section Lukács identifies several antinomies in German idealism that he views as symptomatic of bourgeois thought. These antinomies include the opposition of subject and object, freedom and necessity, individual and society, form and content. Like the other forms of reified consciousness, these antinomies proceed from a contemplative stance and a deficient methodology that is based on the thingified appearance, and thus fail to grasp the underlying social relations that constitute capitalist totality.<sup>320</sup>

Finally, the initial discussion in the section on 'The Standpoint of the Proletariat' reflects the analysis of everyday fetishism in 'What Is Orthodox Marxism?'. There Lukács deploys his conception of fetishism in terms of the consciousness of all agents in capitalism.

The constituent elements of the theoretical element of reification can thus be seen as instances of Lukács' generalisation of the thing-like appearance of the

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<sup>318</sup> (Lukács 1972, 104)

<sup>319</sup> (Lukács 1972, 104)

<sup>320</sup> 'In Section II we were able to point out as emphatically as possible the various intellectual implications flowing from the character of bourgeois society and the systematic limitations of its thought. We drew attention there to the antinomies (between subject and object, freedom and necessity, individual and society, form and content, etc.) to which such thought necessarily led. It is important to realise at this point that although bourgeois thought only landed in these antinomies after the very greatest mental exertions, it yet accepted their existential basis as self-evident, as a simply unquestionable reality. Which is to say: bourgeois thought entered into an unmediated relationship with reality as it was given' (Lukács 1972, 156)

commodity form. As such, his account of the reified mind and of the bourgeois methodologies in which consciousness is separated from its object rest on his conception of the fetish as an objectified, thing-like appearance that veils the underlying social relations that are objectified within it.

### 4.3 Reification as Dominating Mystification

These aspects of Lukács' theory of reification combine to form a theory of what can be termed *dominating mystification*, in which these inter-related strands of reification, which are reflective of Lukács' unique interpretation of commodity fetishism, are drawn together. Lukács thus brings out the repercussions exerted by the objectified, thing-like appearance of social totality upon the individuals who are embedded within it.

This can be seen by addressing Lukács's characterisation of the way in which humans are dominated by reification. Lukács's conceptions of these facets of reification stem from the Hegelian-Marxian and Simmelian and Weberian premises that he initially lays out and are added to in the rest of the 'Reification' essay. As a whole, Lukács's conception of dominating mystification can be seen in his influential use of the term 'second nature.' Second nature conveys the autonomous function of the 'natural laws' of totality and the manner in which it dominates and compels individual action in the form of the objectified false objectivity of things 'in which reification finds its practical expression.' It also conveys the manner in which consciousness is likewise maimed by this separation, in which the transformation of the commodity relation into a thing of 'ghostly objectivity' also 'stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things.'<sup>321</sup> Finally, second nature conveys the naturalised thing-like appearance of these social conditions that provide the basis for theoretical reification.<sup>322</sup> Appropriately, the conception of second nature does this without providing much of an explication for

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<sup>321</sup> (Lukács 1972, 100)

<sup>322</sup> 'However, if this atomisation is only an illusion it is a necessary one. That is to say, the immediate, practical as well as intellectual confrontation of the individual with society, the immediate production and reproduction of life - in which for the individual the commodity structure of all 'things' and their obedience to 'natural laws' is found to exist already in a finished form, as something immutably given-could only take place in the form of rational and isolated acts of exchange between isolated commodity owners.' (Lukács 1972, 92)

the genesis of second nature, or of how it promulgates these autonomous properties of domination. Instead, these properties are grounded on the extensive dominating mystificatory properties of the objectified thing-like appearance of the commodity form.

The commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression and for their attempts to comprehend the process or to rebel against its disastrous effects and liberate them, from servitude to the 'second nature' so created.<sup>323</sup>

As a result there is 'no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his physical and psychic 'qualities' into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reified process.'<sup>324</sup> Lukács's theory of reification can therefore be said to be a theory of dominating mystification.

This conception of dominating mystification can also be seen in passages that outline the repercussions that second nature has on individuals on either side of the class divide. As regards the whole, Lukács accounts for its effects on the class relation in terms of his periodisation of the pervasiveness of commodification. Thus it was 'not until the rise of capitalism' that a 'unified economic structure, and hence a formally unified structure of consciousness that embraced the whole of society came into being.'<sup>325</sup> Consequently, a 'unity is expressed in the fact that the problems of consciousness arising from wage labour were repeated in the ruling class in refined and spiritualised, but, for that reason, more intensified form.'<sup>326</sup>

As result, these characteristics of the dominating mystification of individuals in the class relation also fuse the Hegelian-Marxian and Simmelian and Weberian strands of reification and the properties of domination and mystification. Thus the proletariat's actions, consciousness and 'total personality' are compelled, fragmented and dehumanised due to the manner in which their labour is inverted by virtue of the mystified properties of capitalist totality:

For the proletariat social reality [...] appears in the first instance as the pure *object* of societal events. In every aspect of daily life in which the individual worker imagines himself to be the subject of his own life he finds this to be an illusion that is destroyed

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<sup>323</sup> (Lukács 1972, 84)

<sup>324</sup> (Lukács 1972, 100)

<sup>325</sup> (Lukács 1972, 100)

<sup>326</sup> (Lukács 1972, 100)

by the immediacy of his existence. This forces upon him the knowledge that the most elementary gratification of his needs [...] [t]he quantification of objects, their subordination to abstract mental categories, makes its appearance in the life of the worker immediately as a process of abstraction of which he is the victim, and which cuts him off from his labour-power, forcing him to sell it on the market as a commodity, belonging to him. And by selling this, his only commodity, he integrates it (and himself: for his commodity is inseparable from his physical existence) into a specialized process that has been rationalized and mechanized, a process that he discovers already existing, complete and able to function without him and in which he is no more than a cipher reduced to an abstract quantity, a mechanized and rationalized tool [...] Thus for the worker the reified character of the immediate manifestations of capitalist society receives the most extreme definition possible.<sup>327</sup>

The bourgeois individuals are likewise compelled, subjugated, and by virtue of their class standpoint prevented from grasping the reified social totality. They possess 'individual consciousness' with which they confront the 'overwhelming objective necessities imposed by society of which only minute fragments can be comprehended.'<sup>328</sup> Furthermore their actions consist in quantified, calculating and instrumental activities.<sup>329</sup>

Descriptions such as these are also provided in accounts of the dominating mystification that imposes itself upon other individuals in the capitalist totality, where individuals are compelled by 'the objectified forms' and the 'subjective stances' corresponding to them. One such notable example is bureaucracy, which is such a 'monstrous intensification of one-sided specialisation' that it 'represents [...] a violation of man's humanity.'<sup>330</sup> This is because bureaucracy is premised on its formal separation from qualitative interaction with the essence of 'things', which causes the faculties of bureaucrats to be objectified, detached and split from their personality. Thus in the case of bureaucrats and other vocations, such as lawyers, specialists and journalists, the objectified forms characteristic of their institutional activity operate separately from them, inverting and compelling them to think and behave in an instrumental manner.

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<sup>327</sup> (Lukács 1972, 166-67)

<sup>328</sup> (Lukács 1972, 165)

<sup>329</sup> 'For the capitalist this side of the process means an increase in the quantity of objects for him to deal with in his calculations and speculations. In so far as this process does acquire the semblance of a qualitative character, this goes no further than an aspiration towards the increased rationalisation, mechanisation and quantification of the world confronting him.' (Lukács 1972, 165)

<sup>330</sup> (Lukács 1972, 99)

As a whole the constitution of these objectified social forms of false objectivity and the instrumental existence that they cultivate, thus dominates individuals by estranging them from their labour and forcing them to perform fragmented activities. These objective forms of domination are coupled with the subjective properties of reification where the contemplative, passive and fragmented activity of the worker is reflected in dominated mystified consciousness, which is likewise a type of 'subjugation' that is separated from the object. Lukács's theory of reification is therefore a theory of dominating mystification, which, as premised on his unique conception of fetishism, explains the subjugation and dehumanisation of individuals to the dominating and mystifying properties of the objectified, thingified appearance of social totality.

Now that I have shown how Lukács's interpretation of fetishism is constitutive of the dominating mystification of this theory of reification, I will turn to how he accounts for its constitution in the standpoint of the proletariat.

## 5 The Constitution of Reified Totality

Lukács's account of the composition of reified totality can be seen in the context of the process of de-reification that occurs from the standpoint of the proletariat. These conceptions are themselves linked to the third aspect of his analysis of commodity fetishism: that a social relation between people takes on the character of a thing and generates the phenomena of reification.<sup>331</sup>

For Lukács, the standpoint of the proletariat thus leads it to develop a Hegelian-Marxist conception of capitalism as a dialectical social totality, and to view it as constituted in the manner that Lukács outlines. Although both classes are embedded in reified totality – 'the proletariat shares with the bourgeoisie the reification of every aspect of life'<sup>332</sup> – what is of crucial difference is the standpoint of each class *vis-à-vis* capitalist totality. This is because whilst the bourgeoisie is stuck in

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<sup>331</sup> As many other commentators have noted, the synthetic structure of the standpoint of the proletariat is ordered around the resolution of the problems that Lukács flags up in his discussion of the phenomena of reification and the antinomies of bourgeois thought. These problems are resolved by the proletariat, by virtue of the latter's privileged standpoint, which is shown to afford a dialectical grasp of totality. This leads to Lukács's dialectical generation of class-consciousness, in which this class-consciousness de-reifies totality, leading to praxis and the actualisation of its world-historical revolutionary task.

<sup>332</sup>(Lukács 1972, 137)



immediacy and cannot penetrate the cloak of reification, the proletariat is able to grasp totality by virtue of the role it plays in the constitution of totality.

This is due to the proletarian's place in the process of production. As someone who is compelled to sell her labour-power, the proletarian embodies the contradiction of the subject-object of capitalist totality. Proletarians are commodities that produce the commodity character of reified totality. This integrates them into the production process, which fragments, rationalises and quantifies them;<sup>333</sup> yet it also provides them with a unique standpoint. From the proletarian's standpoint, the 'reified character of the immediate manifestations of capitalist society receives the most extreme definition possible.'<sup>334</sup>

As a consequence, this standpoint in the production of totality leads the proletarian to grasp totality and it generates self-consciousness. Unlike the capitalist, the worker's position as a commodity and thus his status as the subject-object of capitalist totality, 'enables him to surpass the immediacy of his condition.'<sup>335</sup> This supersession is premised on the self-recognition of proletarians as a commodity in which the 'factors' in this standpoint 'create a dialectic between the social existence of the worker and the forms of his consciousness and force them out of their pure immediacy.'<sup>336</sup> This dialectical supersession of immediacy discloses the class relation that constitutes totality and stands behind the veil of immediacy. As a result, the standpoint of the proletariat discloses the constitution of reified totality as being indicative of the objectified separation of subject and object and shows the constituent properties of reified totality as thingified appearances generated by the class relation.

This first aspect is evident in Lukács's description of how the class relation constitutes the objectified and thingified appearance of reified totality. As in 'What is Orthodox Marxism?', this account is scattered, and often relies on Hegelian categories

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<sup>333</sup> 'The quantification of objects, their subordination to abstract mental categories makes its appearance in the life of the worker immediately as a process of abstraction of which he is the victim, and which cuts him off from his labour-power, forcing him to sell it on the market as a commodity, belonging to him. And by selling this, his only commodity, he integrates it (and himself: for his commodity is inseparable from his physical existence) into a specialized process that has been rationalized and mechanized, a process that he discovers already existing, complete and able to function without him and in which he is no more than a cipher reduced to an abstract quantity, a mechanized and rationalized tool.' (Lukács 1972, 160)

<sup>334</sup> (Lukács 1972, 138)

<sup>335</sup> (Lukács 1972, 167)

<sup>336</sup> (Lukács 1972, 168)

and presuppositions rather than upon a fully-fledged exposition. Lukács's most extensive account of how the class relation constitutes reified totality is exhibited in the following passage. It also indicates that he views this appearance in terms of fetishism *qua* objectification as thingified appearance constituted by the class relation:

Man has become the measure of all (societal) things. The conceptual and historical foundation for this has been laid by the methodological problem of economics: by dissolving the fetishistic objects into processes that take place among men and are objectified in concrete relations between them; by deriving the inextricable [*unauflösbar*, translation amended]<sup>337</sup> fetishistic forms from the primary forms of human relations. At the conceptual level the structure of the world stands revealed as a system of dynamically changing relations in which conflicts between man and nature, man and man (in the class struggle, etc.) are fought out.<sup>338</sup>

Thus, in language characteristic of Marx's analysis of the fetish-character of the commodity, according to Lukács's account of the social constitution of reified totality, the class relation constitutes both the separation between subject and object in the process of objectification that occurs in this relation and the corresponding thingified appearance of false objectivity. Both, as we have seen, are indicative of reified capitalist totality.

This second aspect can be seen in more detail in Lukács's account of the de-reifying properties of the class standpoint, which unfold from the proletarian self-

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<sup>337</sup> Livingstone translates *unauflösbar* into 'indissoluble.' I have replaced this with 'inextricable' for several reasons. In the first place the use of 'indissoluble' makes it seem that Lukács is stating that this fetishism cannot be dissolved. This is confusing because it comes right after Lukács's account of how class relations constitute fetish objects that can be dissolved. In addition, while it might be argued here that Lukács is making a distinction between theoretical accounts of fetishism that can be dissolved and the social objectivity of the forms, this still would not make them 'indissoluble', since his entire account of reification is premised on the fact the social relations that constitute capitalism and the thingified appearance of capitalism can be dissolved. Furthermore, this use of fetishistic forms goes against Lukács's description of the following: 'the fetishistic forms of the commodity system [which] begin to dissolve: in the commodity the worker recognizes himself and his own relations with capital.' As I show below, this is reflected in the numerous occasions where Lukács distinguished between: (a) the thingified appearance of reified totality that can be dissolved *via* the class standpoint and (b) the class relations which constitute reification and can only be dissolved in the revolutionary overcoming of capitalism. For this reasons I have changed the term to 'inextricable', by which I take Lukács's point to be that these fetishistic forms of false objectivity are the 'inextricable', necessary appearance of the social relations of capital. In this way the sentence accords with the previous sentence and with the other instances of Lukács's account of fetishism and reification.

<sup>338</sup> (Lukács 1972, 185)

recognition outlined above. In this process, Lukács's conception of fetishism, i.e. his conception of the latter as a thingified false objectivity, is quite telling. For in Lukács's account, proletarian self-consciousness is a form of knowledge that becomes a social reality and '*brings about an objective structural change in the object of knowledge*'<sup>339</sup> This form of knowledge thus de-objectifies the false objectivity of the thingified appearance possessed by the commodity character of capitalist totality, revealing the underlying relations that constitute it. Like a chain reaction, this process of de-reification begins with the de-reification of the production process in which the underlying class relation is demystified, 'and moves to a social process of de-fetishisation in which the qualitative underlying nature of society as a totality constituted by the class relation is grasped':

The special nature of labour as a commodity which in the absence of this consciousness acts as an unacknowledged driving wheel in the economic process now objectifies itself by means of this consciousness. The specific nature of this kind of commodity had consisted in the fact that beneath the cloak of the thing lay a relation between men, that beneath the quantifying crust there was a qualitative, living core. Now that this core is revealed it becomes possible to recognize the fetish character of every *commodity* based on the commodity character of labour power: in every case we find its core, the relation between men, entering into the evolution of society.<sup>340</sup>

This process of the de-objectification of thing-like appearance can also be seen when Lukács lays out several further stages of the dialectic of class-consciousness and de-reification that he holds to be required if society is to be de-reified. These developments are premised on the centrality that totality holds in his Hegelian Marxism. In these instances the class-consciousness of the proletariat as the subject-object of history leads to the de-reification of his Simmelian and Weberian conception of reification. These Simmelian and Weberian instances of de-reification consist in juxtapositions between rationalised things and the processes of becoming that proletarian consciousness can now grasp. One example is Lukács's account of the de-reification of science, in which proletarian consciousness possesses 'the knowledge that social facts are not objects but relations between men is intensified to the point where facts are wholly dissolved into processes.'<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> (Lukács 1972, 169)

<sup>340</sup> (Lukács 1972, 170)

<sup>341</sup> (Lukács 1972, 184)

It is also the case for the proletariat's knowledge of totality. This knowledge fuses Lukács's Hegelian Marxist conception of the proletarian constitution of totality with the Simmelian and Weberian juxtaposition between 'rigidified' 'frozen' things and processes: 'This image of a frozen reality that nevertheless is caught up in an unremitting, ghostly movement at once becomes meaningful when this reality is dissolved into the process of which man is the driving force.'<sup>342</sup>

As a result, Lukács's account of the standpoint of the proletariat can be seen to reflect the interpretation of fetishism employed in his account of the constitution of reified totality; an interpretation that views fetishism in terms of the process of objectification and generation of thing-like appearances that derive from the class relation.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Summary**

In this chapter I focused on the role of fetishism in Lukács's theory of the constitution and constituents of social domination. In contrast to continuous accounts of fetishism as 'reification' I provided an analysis of how Lukács's theory of social domination is based on his own peculiar account of fetishism. In order to do this I began by outlining the Weberian-Simmelian and Hegelian-Marxian strands of his work.

I then turned to the 'Reification' essay, where I demonstrated how Lukács's interpretation of fetishism fused the Hegelian-Marxian and Weberian and Simmelian aspects of his thought while also providing the grounds of the constitution and constituent properties of his theory of reification. I argued that Lukács's account of reification is based on his distinctive interpretation of commodity fetishism, which replaces an account of the abstract alienated and personified character of things with an account of objectified sociality. This conception of objectification forms the basis for a double-faceted conception of fetishism that accounts for social constitution in terms of a process of objectification, and in connection to the corresponding false objectivity of things that veil their content, causing them to possess the rationalised autonomous properties that fuse the Hegelian-Marxian and Weberian-Simmelian strands of his

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<sup>342</sup> (Lukács 1972, 184)

theory. I demonstrated this in my account of how this interpretation of commodity fetishism is constitutive of Lukács's theory of reification through his generalisation of the properties of the commodity form to the practical and theoretical types of reification that include a wide array of social institutions and types of consciousness. My account culminated by synthesising these elements in my characterisation of reification as mystified domination. I closed by demonstrating how the standpoint of the proletariat accounts for the constitution of the objectified and thing-like properties of reified totality. As a result, rather than reification consisting in a theory that is continuous with Marx's account of fetishism, reification or alienation, Lukács's distinctive interpretation of the properties of fetishism is central to his account of the constitution and of the constitutive properties of the dominating, mystificatory properties of reified totality. I will now conclude with my evaluation of this theory.

## 6.2 Evaluation

Lukács' theory of reification is unquestionably of historical importance. Nearly one hundred years after it was produced, it still stands as a seminal attempt to utilise Marx's theory of fetishism as the grounds for a theory of social domination. Several aspects of this theory are undeniably important for the formation of critically orientated schools of Marxism, Hegelianism Marxism and indeed Western Marxism, and for theories that have attempted to apply Marx's analysis of social domination to aspects of society that Marx's analysis did not cover. This is surprising, considering the specific context in which it was written, and given also Lukács's own opinion of this work. However, there are several conceptual criticisms that can be made of Lukács's theory of reification.<sup>343</sup> They pertain to his conception of fetishism and to how this conception informs his account of the constitution and constitutive properties of social domination. As I have shown, Lukács makes several important conceptual moves that render fetishism the basis of his theory of reification. While these moves enable Lukács to extend Marxist categories to articulate and explain the genesis and function of social institutions and types of consciousness, they also render his interpretation problematic. Lukács 'fundamental and crude error' of replacing alienation with

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<sup>343</sup> I will address the problem of the relation between theory and empirical reality in Lukács and the other theorists I am examining in the general conclusion to this thesis.

objectification'<sup>344</sup> is the most notable reason for why this is the case. While this is often pointed out, the ramifications for how this differentiates Lukács's conception of fetishism from Marx, and the repercussions it has for Lukács's theory of social domination, are seldom focused on.

As was shown in the previous chapter, Marx's theory of the fetish-characteristic forms is part of his larger theory of the means by which the particular social form of capitalist social production distributes labour through personifying things as the bearers of value. This theory of fetish-characteristic forms is therefore a central part of Marx's theory of value, which attempts to explain the perverted and inverted social constitution, reproduction and distribution of the social character of capitalist labour as it occurs in terms of the relation between things. It is also a central part of Marx's account of how this process of social constitution consists of a mode of social domination, in which the personified character of these things compels and determines individual actions. It is not a theory of illusory false consciousness in which things veil underlying relations but it rather describes how social categories are embedded in things, and the social characteristics that these things possess. Furthermore, it is not a theory of dehumanisation *per se*, but articulates a theory of how individual actions are structured and dominated by the social imperatives they collectively constitute.

Lukács's conception of fetishism is discontinuous with these aspects of Marx's thought.<sup>345</sup> As I have shown, Lukács's conception of fetishism substitutes the Simmelian and Hegelian notion of social objectification for Marx's account of the social constitution of the autonomous and personified fetish-characteristics of things. As a result, this account of fetishism and the ensuing theory of social domination that he develops from it, rely upon perceiving fetishism as thingification (the objectification of human activity into things that possess false objectivity and which veil real processes) rather than on offering an explanation of how these things possess abstract, autonomous and personified properties, relate to each other as bearers of value by virtue of these real processes, and dominate and compel individual actions. On the one hand, this allows Lukács to integrate his earlier Simmelian and Weberian conception of domination and to generalise the problem of thingification, so as to relate it to institutions and modes of understanding that a theory of personified things might not

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<sup>344</sup> (Lukács 1972, XXII)

<sup>345</sup> This contention contradicts the accounts that I defined above as arguing for continuity between the theories of reification and of fetishism.

encompass. Yet on the other hand, it undermines the coherence and the efficacy of Lukács's theory.<sup>346</sup> This is because it is unclear why things possess autonomous properties simply by virtue of the fact that they are objectified, and why or how those properties dominate people.

This can be seen in Lukács's account of social constitution. In the first place, several criticisms can be made of Lukács' understanding of Marxism as a method that deciphers capitalism as a dialectical social totality. The first criticism has to do with his use of the Hegelian categories of the dialectic and of totality in his conception of Marxism. Rather than using dialectics as a method to demonstrate how facets of his social analysis derive from each other, as Marx did, Lukács's account of capitalism commits that un-Hegelian move of presupposing that capitalism and phenomena within the capitalist totality possess dialectical qualities. This stance is magnified by his conception of capitalism as a totality. Like his conception of dialectics, Lukács' conception of capitalism's function as a totality rests upon his asserted fidelity to Marx's analysis. This is however problematic, because on the one hand Lukács' exposition of the Marxist method does not provide much of an account of how he conceives of Marx's analysis of capitalism, or how this analysis depicts capitalism as a dialectical totality. This problem is furthered, on the other hand, by the fact that Lukács accounts for phenomena within capitalist totality that Marx's analysis did not account for. This means that Lukács's conception of Marxism as a method is different from Marx's method. Yet, Lukács does not address this discrepancy. Nor does he present his own account of how the social constitution of forms that Marx's analysis did not cover derives from Marx's own account of the process of capitalist valorisation. Instead, Lukács premises his analysis on fidelity to Marx, and on the claim that his social analysis of reification is based on 'the problems that grow out of the fetishism of commodities.' What is problematic about this is that Lukács's conception

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<sup>346</sup> It is symptomatic of Colletti and Rose's respective positions that Colletti attributes Lukács's conflation of alienation and objectification and his subsequent criticism of reification with his Hegelianism, while Rose attributes it to his neo-Kantianism. See (Colletti 1973; Rose 1981) As I have shown, I contend that these problems stem from and fuse both strands. This means that you cannot attribute the problems in Lukács's theory to the pernicious influence of either Hegel or neo-Kantianism, but must instead view these problems as indicative of both strands, and as being integral to his theory.

of fetishism, and indeed the problems that grow out of it, is in fact different from that of Marx, and yet at the same time relies on Marx's theory for its coherence.<sup>347</sup>

This is apparent in the method of social analysis evidenced in the 'Reification' essay. As was shown above, Lukács provides an analysis of the phenomena of reification by interpreting different phenomena as 'dialectical' and analogous to the properties of the commodity form. Consequently, Lukács' social analysis treats society as a totality of disparate phenomena that function as parts of an irrational whole, and which possess analogous dominating and mystifying properties. However, apart from referencing social laws, Lukács has not attempted to show why and how these facets of society are implicated in the process of capitalist valorisation and reproduction, or indeed in the function of capitalism as a totality.<sup>348</sup> Instead, his account of social constitution all too-often relies on characterisations that resemble Marx's description of the constitution of the fetish-character of commodities, in which 'social relations' or 'class relations' constitute the reified forms of dialectical capitalist totality and provide the basis for an account of the objectified properties that different aspects of social totality share.

All of these factors add up to a theory of social domination that is grounded in the pervasive process of social objectification, but which does not have a coherent or rigorous account of the genesis of these different reified forms, or of why these reified forms possess their constitutive properties. Instead, the genesis of these different

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<sup>347</sup> Contrary to Rose's criticism the problem is then not only that Lukács 'omitted many details of Marx's theory of value and of the analysis of capitalist economies which followed on in *Capital* from the analysis of the commodity form.' (Rose 1981, 29) As I have shown, this is certainly true, and it forms an important basis for how Lukács' conception of fetishism differs from Marx. Yet one is led to question how the addition of the categories that Rose notes are lacking, such as surplus value, could provide a basis for an analysis of reified entities, such as bureaucracy. It is also unclear how following Marx's method in *Capital* could account for them, since *Capital* does not. What is problematic is that Lukács' conception of Marxism as a method fails to provide a coherent account of the constitution and interrelation of these entities at all. A similar point is made by (Postone 1993) and (Elbe 2011) However, Postone seems to assume that grounding this theory of constitution on the opposition between concrete and abstract labour might account for the Simmelian and Weberian strands of Lukács' thought. I see no reason for such confidence.

<sup>348</sup> This may be why Lukács, by virtue of a further instance of his appropriation of Hegel, falls back on a teleological philosophy of history as the ground of his theory of social constitution that treats capitalism as a historical construct in its moment of overcoming, rather than as a socio-cultural totality the function of which should be explained. Lukács acknowledges this in his 1967 preface (Lukács 1972, xxiii)



forms is comprised of different theories that share similarities, but which are also at odds with each other. The Hegelian-Marxian aspects of Lukács's theory employ elements of Marx's theory such as abstraction, autonomy and personification.<sup>349</sup> These elements are treated as results of the class relation. At the same time, due to the insufficiencies of Lukács' model of social constitution, there is little account of how these elements are constituted. The Simmelian and Weberian strands complement this theory of social domination to the degree that they allow Lukács to include important facets of modern society that Marx's theory did not. It is however problematic that the function that these strands play within the capitalist totality is only accounted for by Lukács' interpretation of the commodity, or by his method of analogy. This means that Lukács, at best, demonstrates that these pernicious aspects of society harmonise with: (a) aspects of the commodity form that are already presupposed in its definition; (b) a number of other aspects of capitalist totality that possess the features of the commodity form.

This demonstration, however, does little to explain why or how these facets of totality possess these qualities nor does it explain how or why things possess autonomous properties. The closest that Lukács comes to giving an explanation is when he presents intriguing comments on the relationship between the rationalised part and the irrational whole, and his statement that both strands are constituted by the capitalist division of labour. However, this mention of the capitalist division of labour does not address the point that the Weberian aspects of Lukács's theory seem to be conceived in a different manner than the Marxian strands; for as was indicated above, they are conceptualised in terms of a fragmented division of labour which is premised on a notion of organic holism. This is different and possibly anathema to a class-based account of the social division of labour. The former is based on the rationalised fragmentation of production within society as a whole; the other is based on the idea of an atomised production for exchange. In any case, the possible juxtaposition between the two is not addressed, because both are left hanging on Lukács's underdeveloped account of the capitalist division of labour, and on his account of how the class relation constitutes reified totality. Consequently, it is not clear how the rest of totality develops from this relation.

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<sup>349</sup> Curiously Postone does not address the similarities that these aspects of Lukács' theory share with his own interpretation of Marx.

As a result, these conceptual deficiencies lead Lukács to a theory of domination that is overly determined – as regards the all-pervasive extent of reification – and undermined by its lack of explication. This is particularly true for the ways in which the autonomous properties of the Hegelian-Marxian and Simmelian and Weberian strands of Lukács's thought are constituted, and for those in which the different aspects of totality are linked. This means that the critical aspect of Lukács' theory – the reduction of these forms to social relations – also flounders, because it is unclear, beyond the fact that they are all objectified, how these social relations constitute the type of social totality that Lukács describes. Consequently, we are left with compelling descriptions of the similar properties that institutions share, their ultimate irrationality and crisis-prone nature, and some jarring descriptions of the ways in which modern societies dominate the behaviour of human beings through processes of rationalisation and dehumanisation. A coherent theory that explains how these phenomena are constituted and constitutive of social relations is however lacking. Nevertheless, these descriptions and the theory that described them proved to be enormously influential in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As we shall see, Lukács' Hegelian Marxism and his theory of reification would be an inspiration and a foil for both Adorno and Lefebvre.

### **3. Adorno, the Fetish Form of the Exchange Abstraction and the Critical Theory of Social Domination.**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I focus on the place of fetishism in Theodor W. Adorno's theory of social domination. In contrast to accounts that equate Adorno's theory of social domination with a nebulous conception of reification, by focusing on the place of fetishism in Adorno's thought, I argue that Adorno's account of the social constitution and constituent properties of social domination is based upon his conception of fetishism. I demonstrate this by focusing on how Adorno theorises social domination in his early and late work. I argue that in his early work, Adorno conceives fetishism through his Marxian interpretation of Lukács, Benjamin and Freud, as evidenced in texts such as *The Idea of Natural History*, *The Actuality of Philosophy*, and *On The fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening*. However, and in contrast, I argue that his later work conceives fetishism through a Hegelian-Marxian conception of the exchange abstraction's fetish-form. This, I will claim, provides the latter with means to elucidate the social genesis and the constituent properties of social domination which are carried out in his dialectical analysis of the objective and subjective forms of social domination proper to a negative totality, thus functioning as a basis for his critical theory of society. I will argue that this later theory attempts to remedy the deficiencies of his earlier positions by providing an account of social objectivity and of a more fully-fledged account of social constitution. However, in the conclusion to this chapter, I will also show that the theory is ultimately undermined by an insufficient account of the genesis and social pervasiveness of the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction.

## I. Literature Review

The bulk of commentary on Adorno's theory of social domination can be placed within the typology outlined at the outset of the thesis.<sup>350</sup> Such accounts tend to either treat Adorno's theory of social domination through the prism of reification, or in parallel to Marx's theory of value. They consist of: (a) accounts that identify a continuity between Adorno's theory of social domination and Lukács's theory of reification; (b) interpretations that equate Adorno's theory of reification to his theory of social domination; or (c) the comparisons made by value-form theorists between Marx's theory of value and Adorno's theory of social domination.

### I.1 Adorno's Theory of Social Domination as Equivalent to Lukács' Theory of Reification

Ralf Wiggershaus's statement that 'Adorno was supporting precisely the same Hegelian-Marxist position which Lukács had developed in *History and Class Consciousness* – but he supported it independent of class considerations and as unashamed speculation'<sup>351</sup> exemplifies the commentary that interprets Adorno's theory of social domination as conceptually continuous with Lukács' theory of reification. On this reading, Adorno's theory of social domination applies Lukács's theory of reification – which is said to combine Marx's theory of commodity fetishism with Weberian

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<sup>350</sup> Two accounts fall outside the three types described in the initial chapter of this thesis: Mathias Benzer's *The Sociology of Adorno* (Benzer 2011) and Damo Miyasaki's *The Confusion of Marxian and Freudian Fetishism in Adorno* (Miyasaki 2002). Benzer's work provides an excellent sociological exegesis of Adorno's social theory. However, Benzer's account is also theoretically limited. He describes Adorno's social theory as a presentation of what he terms the 'double character' of 'exchange society', and holds that the latter is 'estranged'; this is however problematic, as it fails to distinguish between Marx's and Adorno's theory of estrangement. Benzer does however acknowledge the resultant problems to some degree, as he notes that his use of estrangement also prevents an account of how Adorno utilised Marx's concepts in his theory of social domination. Miyasaki argues that Adorno confuses Marx's and Freud's theory of fetishism in *On the Fetish Character and the Regression of Listening*; I however will show below that Adorno employed them in full awareness of their differences.

<sup>351</sup> (Wiggershaus 1995, 95)

rationality – to late capitalist mass society.<sup>352</sup> As I will show this strand of interpretation is problematic for two reasons: (1) it equates the influence Lukács had on elements of Adorno's theory of social domination, and (2) the similarities Lukács' and Adorno's Hegelian-Marxist and Weber-Marxist analyses shared, with Lukács's theory of reification. As a result, this type of commentary does not differentiate Adorno's theory of social domination from Lukács' theorisation of reification. It in fact tends to neglect Adorno's theoretical differences from Lukács, together with the distinction that Adorno makes between fetishism and reification. Consequently, this type of commentary does not address how Adorno's conception of fetishism fits into his theory of social domination, and ultimately describes his theory of social domination as reification.<sup>353</sup>

## **1.2 Adorno's Theory of Social Domination as His Theory of Reification**

Commentary in this strand follows Gillian Rose's distinction between Lukács' and Adorno's theories of reification. As was discussed in the introduction, Rose argues that Adorno's theory of reification 'is grounded in Marx's theory of value in a highly selective fashion' that 'does not mobilise Marx's distinction between abstract and concrete labour' and which does not 'lead to any theory of the extraction of surplus value' either.<sup>354</sup> In Rose's view, Adorno's theory of reification 'was based on commodity fetishism in a way which depended not on work or the labour-process (alienation) but on Marx's theory of value, especially on the distinction between exchange-value and use-value.'<sup>355</sup> This unusual interpretation of Marx's theory of value<sup>356</sup> leads Rose to conclude that 'it is the way unlike things appear to be identical

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<sup>352</sup> An example of this can be seen in Vandenberghe's statement that 'Adorno's theoretical description of social reification conforms to Lukács' description except that in Adorno there is no more proletariat, no more identity of subject and object, and consequently no more hope.' (Vandenberghe 2009, 190)

<sup>353</sup> Studies on Adorno that are exemplary of this include (Vandenberghe 2009) and (Cook 1996)

<sup>354</sup> (Rose 1979, 47)

<sup>355</sup> (Rose 1979, 47)

<sup>356</sup> As I noted in the introduction Rose's interpretation is unusual because she seems to imply there is a distinction between the labour process and Marx's theory of value.

or equal, and the mode of thinking which can only consider them as equal, which is reification as a social phenomenon and as a process of thinking for Adorno.<sup>357</sup>

However, as I have shown, Rose's idiosyncratic distinction between fetishism and reification<sup>358</sup> means that this strand of commentary does not differentiate between Adorno's theory of fetishism and his theory of reification. This interpretation consequently misses the way in which Adorno's analysis of identity-thinking is interrelated with his conceptualisation of the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction which grounds his theory of social domination. Like the other account described above, which blurs Adorno's theory of social domination with Lukács's theory of reification, this reading treats Adorno's theory of social domination as if it were equivalent to his own theory of reification.<sup>359</sup> As I will show, Adorno's theory of identity-thinking is reflective of a central element of his conception of fetishism and it plays a part in his theory of social domination.

### **1.3 Value-Form Theory and Adorno**

Several value-form theorists draw parallels between Adorno's theory of social domination and Marx's theory of value. As is the case with their accounts of Lukács, the value-form theorists that have treated Adorno tend to stress the methodological discontinuity between his work and that of Marx.<sup>360</sup> However, they also stress conceptual similarity, pointing to the importance of abstraction, objective conceptuality, autonomisation, inversion and social compulsion within both Marx and

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<sup>357</sup> Commentary that interprets Adorno's theory of reification as his theory of social domination thus follows Rose and contends that Adorno's conception of reification is based on the interrelation of Marx's theory of use value and exchange value with Adorno's concept of identity thinking. Martin Jay is one of the most notable commentators to follow Rose's interpretation of reification. For Jay, like Rose, Adorno's theory of reification amounts to 'the suppression of heterogeneity in the name of identity.' (Jay 1986; Jay 1984) Recent authors who follow Rose include (Hall 2011, Dahms 2011)

<sup>358</sup> As was shown in the literature review at the beginning of this thesis, Rose makes a peculiar and influential distinction between fetishism and reification. Rose exclusively uses the term 'fetishism' to describe Marx's theory of value, and she uses the term 'reification' to describe Lukács's, Benjamin's and Adorno's interpretations of Marx. Rose does not provide a basis for why she does this, nor does she provide definitions that distinguish reification from fetishism.

<sup>359</sup> See (D. Cook 2004)

<sup>360</sup> See (Elbe 2011), (Reichelt 2007), (Postone 1994) Curiously, Postone's grounds for methodological difference between Adorno and Marx are the same as Rose's.

Adorno's theories of social domination.<sup>361</sup> However, the value-form theorists who point out these similarities have not provided a detailed exegesis of how these elements of Adorno's social theory fit into his theory of social domination. I will demonstrate that they do so by forming part of his conception of fetishism.<sup>362</sup>

In order to do so, I begin by outlining the development of Adorno's theory of social domination. I show how Adorno's early work fused the pre-Marxist Lukács' theory of 'second nature' with Benjamin's micrological method of analysis, and that this was conducted as a means towards interpreting the commodity as the symbolic form of social domination emblematic of the constitutive properties of social domination whilst also holding the key to deciphering its unintentional social constitution. I also show how Adorno's early theory is different from that of Lukács and Benjamin. I will then close this section by showing how these elements are reflected in Adorno's *On the Fetish Character of Music*.

I then present an account of Adorno's late theory of social domination. I argue that this late theory is based on Adorno's Hegelian Marxist interpretation of what I term the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction, and I show how this forms the basis for his dialectical theory of social domination and for his critical theory of society.

I close by arguing that Adorno's theorisation of the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction and its social derivation is insufficient and ultimately undermines his theory of social domination and his critical theory of society.

## 2. Adorno's Marxism

Adorno's thought is often characterised as a monolithic whole that is continuous with Lukács's conception of reification.<sup>363</sup> I distinguish myself from this view in this section by substantiating my interpretation of how: (1) as Stefan Breuer puts it, Adorno 'became the first Marxist theorist since Lukács to make use of the possibilities

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<sup>361</sup> This is particularly the case for Adorno's former students such as (Backhaus 1992 and Reichelt 2007). Breuer (1985, 1994) also points out the similarities between Adorno's interpretation of fetishism and Marx's theory of value. Finally, authors in the school of Open Marxism have drawn parallels between Adorno and Marx. See (Holloway, Matamoros and Tischler 2008)

<sup>362</sup> These characteristics are generally neglected in commentaries that interpret Adorno's social theory of domination through the prism of Lukács's theory of reification or identity thinking.

<sup>363</sup> (Vandenberghe 2009)

of commodity analysis,' by developing 'his own version of the critique of fetishism that Lukács had begun in *History and Class Consciousness*'<sup>364</sup> and (2) the changing nature of Adorno's interpretation of fetishism.

## **2.1 Adorno's Early Work: Natural History, Lukács, Benjamin and the Commodity Form**

Adorno's early conception of fetishism and social domination can be reconstructed from some of the most significant elements of his early work: 'The Idea of Natural History'<sup>365</sup>, 'The Actuality of Philosophy'<sup>366</sup> and 'On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening.'<sup>367</sup> In the first two works Adorno interprets elements of the early Lukács and Benjamin to outline his Marxian conceptions of the commodity-form and social domination, and he does so in a manner that is concerned, as Adorno himself states, with the 'fundamental elements of the materialist dialectic.'<sup>368</sup> In 'On the Fetish Character of Music' Adorno provides a micrological analysis that exemplifies the theories outlined in the first two works, but does so in conjunction with his interpretation of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism.

Adorno's Marxian interpretation of the early Lukács and Benjamin can be seen in *The Idea of Natural History* which fuses the early Lukács's conception of 'second nature' with Benjamin's early methodology.

Adorno interprets Lukács's conception of second nature in *The Theory of the Novel* to characterise his idea of natural history as an historical ontology of social domination. Adorno conceives this social ontology of domination as alienated and autonomous and he uses Lukács's theory of second nature to illustrate this in a dialectical fashion.<sup>369</sup> However, in this interpretation of Lukács, Adorno distinguishes between objectification and alienation. This means that Adorno dialectically interprets second nature, objectively as an 'alienated' 'world' of 'things'; subjectively, as 'long dead

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<sup>364</sup> (Breuer 1985)

<sup>365</sup> (Adorno 1984)

<sup>366</sup> (Adorno 1977)

<sup>367</sup> (Adorno 2001)

<sup>368</sup> (Adorno 1977, 129)

<sup>369</sup> Adorno states elsewhere that he views Lukács' and Benjamin's pre-Marxist work as their most Marxist. The reasons for this will be made apparent in my discussion of how Adorno uses Lukács' and Benjamin's earlier theories to conceptualise the commodity-form and social domination.



interiority.’ Overall, Adorno describes second nature as a ‘meaningful and a meaningless world (an immediate world and an alienated world of commodities).’<sup>370</sup>

For Adorno the key question is ‘how it is possible to know and interpret this alienated, reified, dead world’,<sup>371</sup> and following Benjamin he proposes to interpret ‘the world of estranged things as ciphers’.<sup>372</sup> This leads Adorno to argue that Benjamin’s category of the symbol and his method of constellation can be used to unlock the second nature of the alienated world of commodities as a socially constituted entity. To demonstrate this, Adorno presents a short discussion of the relationship between semblance and second nature. He argues here that ‘second nature’ is a form of semblance but he does not treat semblance as a ‘mere illusion.’ Instead, he argues that ‘semblance expresses something that can not be described independently of its semblance.’<sup>373</sup>

Adorno’s conception of second nature as an alienated, autonomous and inverted form of social domination – a mode of domination that is instantiated in commodities, and which can be deciphered as the symbolic manner in which social essence appears in semblance – is also indicative of Adorno’s early interpretation of commodity fetishism. This is implied in Adorno’s statement that the problems that he is addressing here pertain to the key aspects of Marxist theory. This is made explicit in Adorno’s discussion of the same themes in *The Actuality of Philosophy*. In the latter text, Adorno argues that philosophy cannot provide any holistic explanatory system and that it should, in consequence, be oriented towards interpretation. The type of interpretation that he proposes is based on the method of constellation and on what he calls here the ‘symbol’ or the ‘riddle.’ Adorno defines the ‘riddle’ as a dialectical figure that discloses the unintentional constitution of forms. The ‘task’ of philosophy is to ‘interpret unintentional reality [...] by the power of constructing figures or images out of isolated elements.’<sup>374</sup> In Adorno’s view, this task aligns philosophy with Freudian and Marxist theory.

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<sup>370</sup> (Adorno 1984, 117)

<sup>371</sup> (Adorno 1984, 118)

<sup>372</sup> (Adorno 1984, 118) This methodology differs with Lukács’s approach in *The Theory of the Novel*, which viewed the substance of second nature as indecipherable. See (Adorno 1984, 124) and (Lukács 1974)

<sup>373</sup> (Adorno 1984, 124)

<sup>374</sup> (Adorno 1984, 124)

Philosophy's link with Marxist theory is drawn out in Adorno's discussion of the commodity-form which he presents as an example of one of these riddles and symbols. This discussion also highlights an early difference with the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, and refers back to the idea of natural history.<sup>375</sup> In contrast to Lukács, Adorno does not mistake objectification with the autonomous social properties of things. Adorno treats the commodity-form and the related problem of the 'thing in-itself' as social forms of objectivity possessed by things, rather than as forms of thingified false objectivity.<sup>376</sup> This means that criticism does not destroy false objectivity, so as to disclose the real underlying substratum. Yet criticism does however disclose that these forms of objectivity are unintentionally constituted social phenomena. This is due to several elements that Adorno elucidates here and which he also presented in the *Idea of Natural History*; namely: (a) that the essence of this unintentional process of social constitution appears in the symbolic form,<sup>377</sup> and (b) that disclosing this process denaturalises and historicises these forms of second nature and (c) that this type of criticism is indicative of Marxist theory.

These elements of Adorno's early conception of the commodity and social domination can be seen in Adorno's early works of socio-cultural criticism. These early works can be seen to follow Lukács's concern with mapping the pernicious effects of the commodification of culture through the generalisation of the commodity. But unlike the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, these effects are not based on the generalisation of the false objectivity of thingification and its imminent demise. Rather, this analysis reflects Adorno's earlier theorisations in conceiving the commodity as (1) constituent of the dominating social properties which he had also aligned with second nature and objectively functioning as an alienated world that instils

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<sup>375</sup> (Adorno 1977, 128)

<sup>376</sup> 'Suppose it were possible to group the elements of a social analysis in such a manner that the way they came together made a figure which certainly does not lie before us organically, but which must first be posited: the commodity structure. This would hardly solve the thing-in-itself problem, not even in the sense that somehow the social conditions might be revealed under which the thing-in-itself problem came into existence, as Lukács even thought the solution to be: for the truth content of a problem is in principle different from the historical and psychological conditions out of which it grows' (Adorno 1977, 128)

<sup>377</sup> As Adorno puts it, albeit enigmatically: 'the answer was contained within the riddle, and the riddle portrays only its own appearance and contained the answer within itself as intention.' (Adorno 1977, 130)

bourgeois subjectivity,<sup>378</sup> and (2) as a symbol that unlocks an unintentional social constitution.

These theorisations can be seen in 'On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression Listening'. Here Marx's theory of fetishism is deployed as emblematic of Adorno's dialectical interpretation of Lukács's theory of second nature. Objectively, culture functions as an alienated world of commodities that constitutes the integration, domination and psychic stultification of subjectivity. In order to theorise how this occurs, Adorno fuses Freud and Marx's theory of fetishism by formulating a theory of how the fetish character of commodities conditions individuals to substitute need (use-value) for consumption (exchange-value).<sup>379</sup> In this process of displacement the essence of how capitalism is socially constituted and appears in the fetish character of commodities<sup>380</sup> is mirrored on a subjective level by Adorno's use of the Freudian theory of fetishism, which he employs in order to argue that commodities are objects of substitution that lead to integration and regression.<sup>381</sup>

Adorno's theorisation in this essay thus uses the commodity as symbol to disclose the unintentional constitution and constituent properties of the objective and subjective aspects of social domination,<sup>382</sup> revealing the 'connection between the fetish character of the commodities and the fetishised character of human beings.'<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> 'Impulse, subjectivity and profanation, the old adversaries of materialistic alienation, now succumb to it. In capitalist times, the traditional anti-mythological ferments of music conspire against freedom, as whose allies they once prescribed. The representatives of the opposition to the authoritarian schema become witness to the authority of commercial success [...] The listener is converted, along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser.' (Adorno 2001, 32)

<sup>379</sup> 'The concept of musical fetishism cannot be psychologically derived [...] if the commodity in general combines exchange value and use value, then the pure use value, whose illusion the cultural goods must preserve in a completely capitalist society, must be replaced by pure exchange value, which precisely in its capacity as exchange value deceptively takes over the function of use value. The specific fetish character of music lies in this *quid pro quo*.' (Adorno 2001, 38-39)

<sup>380</sup> 'Even in the realm of the superstructure, the appearance is not merely the concealment of the essence, but proceeds of necessity from the essence itself.' (Adorno 2001, 40)

<sup>381</sup> (Adorno 2003, 8)

<sup>382</sup> 'The fetish character of music produces its own camouflage through the identification of the listener with the fetish [...] The counterpart to the fetishism of music is the regression of listening (Adorno 2001, 48) The regression of listening leads to what Adorno variously describes as childish, infantile, retarded subjectivity and pseudo-activity.'

<sup>383</sup> (Adorno 2001, 38)

In doing so, Adorno's early Marxian social analysis of domination relies on his interpretation of Lukács's conception of second nature as a mode of domination, and on the Benjaminian methodology with which that concept was fused in *The Actuality of Philosophy* and in *On the Idea of Natural History*. There are however two exceptions to this: (1) In contrast to Lukács, Adorno does not confuse alienation with objectification. Thus rather than treating fetishism as a form of thingified false objectivity that veils its essence, Adorno treats fetishism as the form in which social constitution appears with the constituent properties of autonomous social objectivity. His theorisation of the subjectivity that corresponds to second nature is constituted by this fetish form of objectivity, and employs Freudian categories to describe a state of psychic regression and mutilation rather than a notion of long dead interiority.<sup>384</sup> (2) In opposition to Benjamin, Adorno stresses the importance of accounting for the mediation of the micrological objects of investigation by addressing the capitalist totality in which social objectivity is characterised by the second nature of the alienated world of commodities.<sup>385</sup> These differences with Lukács and Benjamin are drawn out in Adorno's later theory of social domination,<sup>386</sup> which also possesses a more fully formed account of social constitution and domination.

## **2.2 Adorno's Later Work: Adorno, Marx, Hegel and the Fetish-Form of the Exchange Abstraction. The Hegel-Marx Analogy**

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<sup>384</sup> Adorno also uses reification in this essay in a proto-Lukácsian manner in terms of: (a) the separation of parts from the whole, and (b) in relation to the Freudian categories of infantile regression and dehumanisation. These uses indicate that reification is part of Adorno's theory of social domination, and suggest that it is used in terms of the aspects of fragmentation that relate to the Weberian strand of Lukács' theory but also that this part of Adorno's theory of social domination, which is distinguished from his theory of fetishism, has an inconsistent relationship with Lukács' theory of reification.

<sup>385</sup> 'In music as elsewhere, the discrepancy between essence and appearance has grown to a point where no appearance is any longer valid, without mediation, as verification of the essence.' (Adorno 2001, 45)

<sup>386</sup> These important differences between Benjamin and Adorno's conception of fetishism are also discussed in their correspondence (see T. W. Adorno and Mann 2006) The discussion of fetishism in these letters highlights a major point according to which Rose's peculiar interpretation of reification is undermined. This is because the explicit topic of conversation between Adorno and Benjamin is the fetish character of commodities, which Rose describes as reification.

Adorno's later formulation of fetishism and its role in his theory of composition and of the characteristics of social domination occurs following his return to Germany in the 1960s. This formulation breaks with his earlier account of fetishism and with his theory of social domination.<sup>387</sup> Rather than conducting micrological investigations based on the commodity, Adorno becomes concerned with formulating macrological theories that account for the constitution and the constituent properties of social domination. These theories are based on his fusion of Hegel and Marx, and his formulation of what I will term the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction.

Adorno provides what can be called a 'dialectical' fusion of Hegel and Marx. He interprets the two thinkers' theories of social constitution as interrelated with each other. This means that Adorno has a Hegelian interpretation of Marx, in which the latter is seen as a dialectical theorist who views capital as a social totality; yet he also contends that the late Marx followed Hegel in theorising capitalist totality through 'the objectivity of the concept' and by viewing labour as social labour.<sup>388</sup> He consequently conceives Marx's theory of fetishism in this Hegelian light.<sup>389</sup>

This also means that Adorno supplements what he saw as the deficient elements of Marx's theory, such as epistemology (which, according to Adorno, Marx 'rampaged through like an elephant in a china shop'<sup>390</sup>) with Hegelian concepts. These Hegelian concepts remedy Marx's neglect of the conceptual element in exchange that is necessary for conceptualising equivalents and non-equivalents as equivalents. Adorno links this to the Hegelian concept of identity thinking.<sup>391</sup> Like exchange, identity

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<sup>387</sup> This period also signifies Adorno's rapprochement with Marx for an articulation of a macrosocial theory, following the Nietzschean and Weberian narratives of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

<sup>388</sup> Adorno in (Backhaus 1997)

<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

<sup>389</sup> This can be seen in Adorno's statement that Marx's chapter on fetishism is 'truly a piece of the legacy of classic German philosophy.' (Adorno 2001, 190)

<sup>390</sup> (Adorno 2001, Materialism Imageless)

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

<sup>391</sup> Adorno's anthropological speculations in (Horkheimer and Adorno 2007) trace the development of a type of reason akin to identity thinking in the historical process of humanity's separation from and domination of nature. But Adorno also treats capitalist exchange and identity thinking as qualitatively different to this prehistory. Thus this prehistoric form seems to be historically responsible for the development of capitalism, but also distinct from it. This can be seen in Adorno's statement that: 'In the enlightened world, mythology has entered into the profane [...] It is not merely that domination is paid for by the alienation of men from the objects dominated: with

thinking is unable to grasp the entire array of non-identical mediations in the object or in the relation between objects. It therefore serves as the epistemological element that Adorno saw as lacking in Marx,<sup>392</sup> and makes exchange and identity thinking dialectically interrelated: Identification is 'schooled in exchange' and 'exchange would not be without those involved in such transactions adopting the identification principle.'<sup>393</sup>

Through this Hegelian Marxist conception of exchange, Adorno also integrates the categories of Hegel and Marx's social philosophy. Exchange thus embodies the objectivity of the concept central to Adorno's interpretation of Marx and Hegel's social theory, possessing a socially constituted and constituting conceptuality. This makes Adorno's interpretation of fetishism – as the exchange abstraction's fetish form, which is characteristic of this conceptuality – the basis for Adorno's fusion of Hegel and Marx, and for his theory of the social constitution and the constituent properties of social domination.<sup>394</sup>

### 2.3 The Fetish-Form of the Exchange Abstraction

Adorno never provides a complete explication of the social constitution of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction. In consequence, it has to be reconstructed from his scattered comments on the topic, and my attempt to do so here is composed of three parts. Firstly, I will set out Adorno's interpretation of Marx; I will then show how this interpretation is instantiated in Adorno's discussion of the fetish form of the

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the objectification of spirit, the very relations of men - even those of the individual himself - were bewitched. [...] Animism spiritualises the object, whereas industrialism objectifies the spirits of men.' (Horkheimer and Adorno 2007)

<sup>392</sup> 'The exchange-principle, the reduction of human labor to an abstract general concept of average labor-time, is Ur-related to the identification-principle. It has its social model in exchange, and it would not be without the latter, through which non-identical particular essences and achievements become commensurable, identical. The spread of the principle constrains the entire world to the identical, to totality.'

(Adorno 2001, 'On the Dialectics of Identity')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

<sup>393</sup> (Adorno 2002, 107)

<sup>394</sup> 'Concept and reality are of the same contradictory essence. What tears society apart antagonistically, the dominating principle, is the same thing which, intellectualised, causes the difference between the concept and that which is subordinated under it.'

(Adorno 2001, 'Substance and Method')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

exchange abstraction; finally, I will demonstrate how Adorno's conception of the exchange abstraction draws on elements of Hegel's philosophy. Following this reconstruction I move to Adorno's dialectical theory of social domination.

Adorno's interpretation of Marx's theory of fetishism can be most clearly identified in the comments that Adorno makes on the commodity, on exchange, fetishism and reification in a 1962 seminar.<sup>395</sup> On the interpretation that he presents there, it is abstract labour which makes commodities exchangeable.<sup>396</sup> Abstract labour thus 'abstracts from living opponents' making commodities 'a kind of sum of something solid, objective [*Dinglichem*].' By virtue of these attributes of abstract labour, the commodity also possesses its fetish form which Adorno characterises in autonomous and personified terms:

On the face of it, these abstractions make what is exchanged a thing in itself. What is a social relation appears as if it was the sum of objective qualities of an object. The concept of commodity fetishism is nothing but this necessary process of abstraction. By performing the operation of abstraction, the commodity no longer appears as a social relation but it seems as if value was a thing in itself.<sup>397</sup>

As Adorno contends, these autonomous and personified properties are constituted in social production for exchange:

It is characteristic of commodity economy (*Warenwirtschaft*) that what characterizes exchange – i.e. that it is a relation between human beings – disappears and presents itself as if it was a quality of the things themselves that are to be exchanged. It is not the exchange that is fetishized but the commodity. That which is a congealed social relation within commodities is regarded as if it was a natural quality, a being-in-itself of

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<sup>395</sup> This seminar is published as the appendix to (Backhaus 1997) and available at <http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>. It was kindly translated for me by Verena Erlenbusch for the purpose of reconstructing Adorno's theory of fetishism. I have amended some of the terms Erlenbusch translated to bring out the Marxian connotations.

<sup>396</sup> 'What makes commodities exchangeable is the unity of socially necessary abstract working time [*Arbeitszeit*]. Abstract work, because through a reduction to unity one abstracts from use value, from needs.' (Backhaus 1997)  
<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

<sup>397</sup> (Backhaus 2006,6)  
<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

things. It is not exchange which is illusory, because exchange really takes place. The illusion (*Schein*) in the process of exchange lies in the concept of surplus value.<sup>398</sup>

Adorno thus interprets fetishism as the autonomous, abstract and socially objective properties possessed by commodities which are constituted by social labour and realised in exchange. This is why I term Adorno's conception of fetishism - the fetish form of the exchange abstraction.

As in Adorno's earlier work, the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction is objective, not subjective<sup>399</sup> or psychological.<sup>400</sup> This is because '[i]n a society in which exchange value is the dominant principle, this fetishizing is realised necessarily.'<sup>401</sup>

Because exchange-value is the dominant principle, fetishism realises itself necessarily in an autonomous form of compulsion. Both sides of the class relation are forced to take on the function of 'character masks,' which are 'derived from objective conditions' wherein 'the role [...] [is] imposed on the subject by the structure.' Workers are compelled to sell their labour power in order to survive. Capitalists are compelled to valorise value to 'prevent themselves from going broke.'<sup>402</sup>

Fetishism also determines reification, which Adorno distinguishes from the above accounts of compulsion, and derives from the fetish form of the exchange abstraction. Reification is thus established by the fetish form of the exchange abstraction. This is because the fetish form of the exchange abstraction is 'not simply false consciousness but results from the structure of political economy.' For Adorno 'this is the actual

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<sup>398</sup> (Backhaus 2007, 4)

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<sup>399</sup> 'Concepts like the fetish character of commodities can only be understood when one does not just transform them into subjective categories.' (Backhaus 2007, 7)  
<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

<sup>400</sup> 'This is the actual reason why consciousness is determined by being. What is decisive is that the objective structure of economic form realises from within itself fetishization.' (Backhaus 2007, 7)  
<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

<sup>401</sup> (Backhaus 2007, 9)  
<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

<sup>402</sup> (Backhaus 2007, 9)  
<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>



reason why consciousness is determined by being.<sup>403</sup> Reification is thus defined as 'human beings' becoming 'dependent on those objectivities' of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction 'which are obscure to them.'<sup>404</sup> However, since reification is established by the autonomous and personified properties of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction, 'reification [*Verdinglichung*] is not only false consciousness but simultaneously also reality, insofar as commodities really are alienated from human beings. We really are dependent on the world of commodities [*Warenwelt*].'<sup>405</sup>

Thus Adorno's interpretation of Marx distinguishes between the reified social relations of exchange, reification and fetishism. For Adorno, reification on a practical and theoretical level is established by reified social relations and the personification of things with both as central elements of social domination. As I will show, this distinction is reflected in Adorno's social theory of domination with some differentiation. On the one hand, the pernicious effects of the fetishistic, autonomous objectivity of social totality on persons exceeds an account of reification, as it includes accounts of compulsion, psychological and ontological human maiming that are explicated in his account of fetishism and social domination and are not described or captured by the metaphor of thingification or objectification. On the other hand at this point in his work<sup>406</sup> Adorno also differentiates this type of domination from practical reification and reified consciousness.<sup>407</sup> This is also why he states that other types of

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<sup>403</sup>(Backhaus 2007, 3)

<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

<sup>404</sup>(Backhaus 2007, 9)

<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

<sup>405</sup>(Backhaus 2007, 9)

<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

<sup>406</sup> A proper philological study of the usage of the terms 'reification' and 'fetishism' in the entirety of Adorno's corpus exceeds the limits of this thesis. Yet as I show in what follows, the distinction between 'fetishism' and 'reification' in his late work is indicative of the move to provide macrological social theory based on a more complex reading of Marx's theory of fetishism.

<sup>407</sup> This corresponds to the one definition of reified consciousness given by Adorno that I have been able to find. In *On Subject Object*, reified consciousness is defined as the type of consciousness 'which mistakenly takes itself for nature, is naïve: a historical formation and itself mediated through and through, it takes itself, to speak with Husserl for an 'ontological sphere of absolute origins' and takes the thing confronting it, which it itself has trussed up, for the coveted matter itself.' (T. W. Adorno 1983, 252)

reified consciousness are of secondary importance to the reified consciousness established by the fetish-character of commodities.<sup>408</sup> In contrast to accounts that subsume all of these aspects of Adorno's theory under reification, I focus on foregrounding his account of fetishism and the way it is realised in his account of the compulsive and maiming aspects of social domination.

In Adorno's view these attributes of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction are 'characteristic of commodity economies.' These characteristics signal why 'Marx does not start with consumption but with production – production understood as: dominance [*Vorherrschaft*] of the proprietors [*der Verfügenden*]. This approach is more just to reality.' These properties also lead to the naturalisation of the exchange abstraction's attributes, so that 'congealed social relations within commodities are regarded as if they were a natural quality, a being-in-itself of things.'<sup>409</sup>

These characteristics are also the reason why Adorno states that the fetish form of the exchange abstraction 'still is the key to society' and is what 'distinguishes' the Frankfurt School from 'all other traditions of sociology.'<sup>410</sup> They are mirrored in Adorno's Hegelian-Marxist interpretation that presents the exchange abstraction as constituting and constitutive of the 'negative universality' of social totality. This can be seen in Adorno's discussions of the exchange abstraction's place in his social theory.

Adorno describes the exchange abstraction as having emerged historically from the 'dissolution of all products and activities into exchange-values.'<sup>411</sup> This dissolution was 'presupposed' by the social form of production, which consisted of 'the dissolution of all solidified personal (historical) relationships of dependency in production, as much as the all-round dependency of the producers on each other.'<sup>412</sup> Due to this

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<sup>408</sup> 'What is essential is that the commodity disappears as a social relation, all other reactions of reified consciousness are secondary things' (Backhaus 2007, 7) Since this thesis is concerned with Adorno's theory of fetishism I refrain from examining his account of reified consciousness in phenomena such as positivism, class consciousness etc.

<sup>409</sup>(Backhaus 2007, 6)

<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/> Here we also see how Adorno's concept of natural history is interrelated with his interpretation of Marx.

<sup>410</sup>(Backhaus 2007, 1)

<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

<sup>411</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Interruption of the Dialectic in Hegel')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

<sup>412</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Interruption of the Dialectic in Hegel')

development, a contradictory form of atomised dependence arose in which 'the production of every individual is dependent on the production of all others; as much as (also) the transformation of one's products into food has become dependent on the consumption of all others.'<sup>413</sup> What Adorno refers to as 'this reciprocal dependency' is 'expressed in the constant necessity of exchange and in exchange-value as an all-round mediator.'<sup>414</sup>

As a result, this constant necessity constitutes the exchange abstraction, which lies in 'society itself' and 'becomes constitutive of society'.<sup>415</sup> This is because a necessary process of abstraction occurs in exchange:<sup>416</sup> 'in terms of average social labour time the specific forms of the objects to be exchanged are necessarily disregarded; instead, they are reduced to a universal unit. The abstraction, therefore, lies not in the abstracting mode of thought of the sociologist, but in society itself.'<sup>417</sup>

The development of this exchange abstraction also means that it comes to constitute society and is constitutive of society as such; 'society is a system in the sense of a synthesis of an atomized plurality, in the sense of a real yet abstract assemblage of what is in no way immediately or 'organically' united. The exchange

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<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

<sup>413</sup> (Adorno 2001, 'Interruption of the Dialectic in Hegel')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

<sup>414</sup> This mediation is also felt conversely. in the necessary type of self-interested rationality that this form of social objectivity compels, which Adorno grounds on the following passage from the *Grundrisse*: 'the private interest is itself already a socially determined interest and can be accomplished only under the conditions posited by the society and the means given by it; hence it is tied to the reproduction of these conditions and means. It is the interest of the private; but its content, like its form and means of realization, are given by means of social conditions independent of all.'

(Adorno, 2001, 'Interruption of the Dialectic in Hegel')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

<sup>415</sup> 'The abstract element here is not an idea which is content with the trifling observation that everything is connected to everything else. It is something which I believe to be a central feature of any theory of society [...] The abstraction in question here is really the specific form of the exchange process itself, the underlying social fact through which socialization first comes about.' (Adorno 2000 Lecture Four)

[http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34\\_soc\\_4.html](http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34_soc_4.html)

<sup>416</sup> 'In developed societies the exchange takes place, as you all know, through money as the equivalent form. Classical political economy demonstrated, as did Marx in his turn, that the true unit which stands behind money as the equivalent form is the average necessary amount of social labour time, which is modified, of course, in keeping with the specific social relationships governing the exchange.' (Adorno 2000 Lecture Four)

[http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34\\_soc\\_4.html](http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34_soc_4.html)

<sup>417</sup> (Adorno 2000 Lecture Four)

[http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34\\_soc\\_4.html](http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34_soc_4.html)

relationship largely endows the system with a mechanical character.<sup>418</sup> This means that 'something like a 'concept is implicit in society in its objective form''<sup>419</sup> also providing the grounds for Adorno's dialectical fusion of Hegel's notion of the concept with Marx's social theory, shedding 'light on why Hegel, its apologist, and Marx, its critic, converge in the conception that what the former named the World-Spirit, possesses a preponderance of being-in-itself.'<sup>420</sup>

Adorno's description of how this concept functions as an 'all around mediator' reflects his description of Marx's theory of fetishism as an alien, autonomous, inverted form of domination. This can be seen in Adorno's characterisation of this 'mediating conceptuality'<sup>421</sup> as an alien form of conceptuality that is 'independent both of the consciousness of the human beings subjected to it and of the consciousness of the scientists.'<sup>422</sup> It is also reflected in his characterisation of its autonomous and dominating properties as a 'conceptuality which holds sway in reality',<sup>423</sup> and which is 'the objectively valid model for all essential social events',<sup>424</sup> so that 'society obeys this conceptuality *tel quel*.'<sup>425</sup> Finally, it is evident in his statement on the inverted status of society in which 'the fetish character of commodities [...] historically has become the *prius* of what according to its concept would have to be *posterius*.'<sup>426</sup>

This Hegelian-Marxian interpretation of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction also serves as the ground to further differentiate Adorno's theory from that of Benjamin's and Lukács'. Adorno distinguishes his theory from Benjamin's through the heightened importance that his macrological theory of the exchange abstraction grants to that abstraction's mediation of every fragment of social totality; and he differentiates himself from Lukács in several respects. Firstly, on a methodological level, he moves away from using the concept of the commodity in

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<sup>418</sup>(Adorno 2000 Lecture Four)

[http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34\\_soc\\_4.html](http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34_soc_4.html)

<sup>419</sup>(Adorno 2000 Lecture Four)

[http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34\\_soc\\_4.html](http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/adorno34_soc_4.html)

<sup>420</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Interruption of the Dialectic in Hegel')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

<sup>421</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Interruption of the Dialectic in Hegel')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

<sup>422</sup>(Adorno 1981, 80)

<sup>423</sup>(Adorno 1981, 80)

<sup>424</sup>(Adorno 1981, 80)

<sup>425</sup>(Adorno 1981, 80)

<sup>426</sup>(Adorno 1983, 248)

favour of using exchange as the basis for the critique of capitalism as a socio-cultural totality. Secondly, on a theoretical level, this is reflected in his move away from his use of Lukács' early conception of second nature to his conception of the exchange abstraction, and in a further move, away from describing the objective and autonomous aspect of social domination through alienation towards addressing it *via* abstraction, autonomisation, personification and inversion. This is coupled to his criticism of the 'tireless charge of reification' for its 'idealist', 'subjectivist' and un-dialectical focus, which conflates domination with objectification, bases itself on the 'isolated category' of 'thingly' appearance and 'blocks' a properly dialectical diagnosis of social domination.<sup>427</sup> These deficiencies of Lukács's theory of reification are contrasted with Marx's properly dialectical and objective theory of the fetish character of commodities.<sup>428</sup>

Adorno's late work thus conceives of fetishism in terms of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction, which provides a basis for his fusion of Hegel and Marx and his account of the social constitution and the constituent properties of social domination. I will now turn to the later work by showing the way in which Adorno uses the conception of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction in his dialectical theory of social domination.

### **3 Adorno's Dialectical Social Theory of Domination**

Adorno's dialectical social theory of domination can be seen to apply this Hegelian-Marxist theory of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction to the social

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<sup>427</sup> 'The trouble is with the conditions that condemn mankind to impotence and apathy and would yet be changeable by human action; it is not primarily with people and the way conditions appear to people.' (Adorno 2001, 'Objectivity and Reification') <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

<sup>428</sup> 'The fetish-character of commodities is not chalked up to subjective-mistaken consciousness, but objectively deduced out of the social *a priori*, the process of exchange. Already in Marx the difference is expressed between the preponderance of the object as something to be critically established and its remnants in the existent, its distortion by the commodity-form'. (Adorno 2001, 'Objectivity and Reification') <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt> Following from his criticism of reification, Adorno also uses Marx to back up his point that the focus of criticism should be on how the object is socially mediated rather than on the object itself, by arguing *contra* Lukács that the late Marx developed a concept of emancipation that consisted in a form of mediation with the object, as opposed to the eradication of the subject/object divide proposed by Lukács and the young Marx.

totality. Adorno's theory is dialectical because it treats society as a dialectical totality that is collectively composed by subjects who are in turn composed by that society.<sup>429</sup> Since, as I have shown, Adorno holds that society is constituted and constitutive of exchange, exchange is conceived as the mediating pole of the supra-individual and individual phenomena that Adorno analyses. It forms part of a constellation that also includes his theory of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction.<sup>430</sup>

The importance of exchange to Adorno's later theory can also be seen in relation to the range of phenomena that he addresses in relation to it. This includes:

- 1) The social form of late capitalist society. Here exchange forms society along the subjective/objective lines that I am outlining in this chapter.
- 2) The grounds for the derivation of social categories in terms of the individual functioning as a category of abstraction; transcendental individual over individual.<sup>431</sup>
- 3) The grounds of derivation from 1) to forms of social totality and consciousness which mirror the structure of exchange, i.e. identity thinking,<sup>432</sup> Logic.<sup>433</sup> The

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<sup>429</sup> 'Subject and object diverge in this society, and, to an unprecedented degree, living people are the objects of social processes which, in their turn, are composed of people.' (T. W. Adorno 2002, 137)

<sup>430</sup> The dialectical nature of Adorno's social theory means that there is no clean separation between objective/subjective and supra-individual/individual. What is objective it is ultimately the ground for subjectivity, and what is supra-individual is ultimately the ground for individuality, and *vice versa*. This will become clear in the course of my exposition; I separate the two here for the sake of clarity.

<sup>431</sup> 'As the extreme borderline case of ideology the transcendental subject comes to within a hair of the truth. The transcendental universality is no mere narcissistic self-exaltation of the I, not the hubris of its autonomy, but has its reality in the domination which ends up prevailing and perpetuating itself through the exchange-principle. The process of abstraction, which is transfigured by philosophy and solely ascribed to the cognizing subject, plays itself out in the factual exchange-society. (Adorno 2001, 'On Interpretation of the Transcendental')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

<sup>432</sup> 'The exchange-principle, the reduction of human labor to an abstract general concept of average labor-time, is Ur-related to the identification-principle. It has its social model in exchange, and it would not be without the latter, through which non-identical particular essences and achievements become commensurable, identical.' (Adorno 2001, 'On the Dialectics of Identity')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

<sup>433</sup> 'As the exchange-principle the bourgeois ratio came to resemble that which it made commensurable – wished to identify – with itself, the real one of the systems, with

subsumption of the qualitatively different under a quantifying abstraction. This is also related to what Adorno describes as the exchange of like for like.

- 4) The subsumption of the qualitatively different within an homogenous equivalence.
- 5) The subsumption of the particular within the universal.
- 6) The universal fungibility of all – or at least practically all – aspects of the social totality.
- 7) The precedence that exchange-value has over use-value in consumption.
- 8) The traditional Marxist conception of the origination of surplus-value and class exploitation (which is also the ground for Adorno's more traditional use of ideology and immanent critique in terms of false claims not living up to reality).
- 9) The Benjaminian conception of exchange as myth and ever-sameness.
- 10) Fair exchange as the utopian promise that will transcend exchange.
- 11) The model for the philosophy of history.
- 12) Psychological forms of derivation as described in human emotions or by using the Freudian typology.
- 13) The destruction of experience.
- 14) What resists exchange and is thus made important in relation to it: non-identity, forms of resistance.

In what follows I will now focus on how the objective supra-individual and subjective individual aspects of Adorno's dialectical social theory of domination draw on his theory of the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction in conjunction with other theories.

### **3.1 Objective Supra-Individual**

The supra-individual level of Adorno's dialectical social theory of domination derives from the alien, abstract, autonomous and inverted aspects of his Hegelian-Marxist interpretation of fetishism. These elements are deployed in Adorno's Hegelian,

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increasing albeit potentially murderous success, leaving less and less outside.' (Adorno 2001, 'On the Dialectics of Identity').  
<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

Marxian and Weberian analysis of social institutions and in his critique of cultural forms.

As was the case with Lukács' social analysis, the capitalist society that Adorno theorises is different than the early liberal type of capitalism that Marx sought to theorise in its ideal average. Foremost among these differences are several developments that Adorno explicates through his theory of the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction. These include the totally administered society as the outgrowth of Keynesian capitalist state bureaucracies, administration and rationalised Fordist production, and the emergence of mass societies through the integration of the working class.

Adorno analyses these forms of supra-individual objectivity by treating them in conjunction with the fetish form of the exchange abstraction.<sup>434</sup> Adorno's philosophical writings, particularly *World Spirit and Natural History*, thus interpret Hegel's social philosophy – including his account of Spirit, World Spirit, law and other social institutions – as indicative of the autonomous, abstract and supra-individual elements of Marx's theory of fetishism.<sup>435</sup> In his cultural writings, Adorno theorises integration into mass society by arguing that cultural forms have been subsumed by exchange, and that they thus possess the same formal properties as commodities. These elements are incorporated within Adorno's Weberian analysis of institutions in his sociological essays, such as 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?',<sup>436</sup> and 'Society'.<sup>437</sup>

Adorno responds to the sociological theories of the era in these essays by arguing that contemporary society has to be conceived by dialectically combining the Weberian theory of rationalisation with his Hegelian-Marxist theory of capital.<sup>438</sup> The

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<sup>434</sup> The way that Adorno does this has some similarities to Lukács, but it does not simply consist in generalising the properties of the commodity.

<sup>435</sup> Adorno's use of the concept of 'natural history' in his late work is symptomatic of the development of his theory of social domination. Rather than using Lukács' theory of second nature as the grounds for the theory, Adorno bases it on his student Alfred Schmidt's interpretation of Marx's theory of natural history. (Schmidt 1971) Adorno consequently uses the terms 'natural history' and 'the law of value' as equivalent to his theory of fetishism. For the sake of clarity, I am using the fetishism-form of the exchange abstraction to designate these terms.

<sup>436</sup> (Adorno 2001b)

<sup>437</sup> (Adorno 1969-70)

<sup>438</sup> Thus while those commentaries that treat Adorno's theory of social domination as Lukács' theory of reification are right to point out that both use their interpretations of Marx's theory of fetishism and Weberian rationalisation in their accounts of social



Weberian element describes the rationalisation of production and institutional administration, which Adorno links to the 'profit principle'.<sup>439</sup> His Hegelian-Marxian conception of capitalism describes the social relations and supra-individual forms of domination that characterise contemporary society.<sup>440</sup> This can be seen in Adorno's comments that 'concepts such as exchange-society might have their objectivity, revealing a compulsion of the generality behind the matter at hand' and that totality is characterised by 'structural laws which condition the facts' and 'tendencies which more or less stringently follow the historical constitution of the total system'.<sup>441</sup>

Adorno's theory of the objective aspect of social domination is the consequence of these supra-individual autonomous social forms. This is encapsulated in the theoretical statements that Adorno provides that describe the abstract and inverted characteristics of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction, and which present them as constitutive of the social domination of totality:

In Hegel's words the all-penetrating ether of society [...] is anything but ethereal, but on the contrary an *ens realissimum* [Latin: that which is real, materially existent]. Insofar as it is abstractly veiled, the fault of its abstraction is not to be blamed on a

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domination, they do not address the differences in these accounts. Nor do they address Adorno's utilisation of other theories.

<sup>439</sup> 'The oft-cited profit-motive has to be oriented in capitalism to the profit-principle, to market chances, it must avail itself of the calculating capital account; its organizational form has to be that of free labor, household and firm have to be separated, it requires bookkeeping and a rational legal system in accordance with the dominating principle of rationality in capitalism at large. The completeness of this catalogue remains in doubt; it is especially to be asked, as to whether the Weberian emphasis on rationality, disregarding the class-relationship which reproduces itself through the exchange of equivalents, already equates the method of capitalism overmuch to its Spirit, although the exchange of equivalents and its problematic would certainly not be thinkable without rationality.' (Adorno 2001b)

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1968/late-capitalism.htm>

<sup>440</sup> 'In the categories of critical-dialectical theory I would like to suggest as a first and necessarily abstract answer, that contemporary society is above all an industrial society according to the level of its productive forces [Adorno's emphasis]. Industrial labour has become the model pattern of society everywhere and across all borders of political systems. It developed itself into a totality due to the fact that modes of procedure, which resemble the industrial ones, are extending by economic necessity into the realms of material production, into administration, the distribution-sphere and that which we call culture. Conversely, society is capitalism in terms of its relations of production', (Adorno's emphasis). (Adorno 2001b)

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1968/late-capitalism.htm>

<sup>441</sup> (Adorno 2001b) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1968/late-capitalism.htm>

solipsistic and reality-distant thinking, but on the exchange-relationships, the objective abstractions, which belong to the social life-process. The power of that abstraction over humanity is far more corporeal than that of any single institution, which silently constitutes itself in advance according to the scheme of things and beats itself into human beings. The powerlessness which the individual experiences in the face of the totality is the most drastic expression of this.<sup>442</sup>

The result is a form of supra-individual domination and powerlessness that Adorno characterises as 'free floating angst', 'fate' or 'doom': 'Individuals are subsumed under social production, which exists as a doom outside of them; but social production is not subsumed under individuals, who operate it as their capacity in common.'<sup>443</sup>

As in Adorno's interpretation of Marx, this means that individuals are compelled to carry out the functions of 'character masks'.<sup>444</sup> Such a state of affairs reflects the fetish form of the exchange abstraction in which 'the abstraction of exchange value is *a priori* allied with the domination of the general over the particular, of society over its captive membership.'<sup>445</sup> This means that '[t]he concrete form of the total system requires everyone to respect the law of exchange if he does not wish to be destroyed, irrespective of whether profit is his subjective motivation or not.'<sup>446</sup> As a result, classes and the individuals in these classes are dominated by the 'negative universality' of late capitalist totality, so that: 'economic processes continue to perpetuate domination over human beings, the objects of such are no longer merely the masses, but also the administrators and their hangers-on' who as 'appendages of

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<sup>442</sup>(Adorno 2001b) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1968/late-capitalism.htm>

<sup>443</sup>(Adorno 2001b) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1968/late-capitalism.htm>

<sup>444</sup> Adorno states that the concept of 'character mask': 'applies to almost all the functions human beings carry out today as the way that objective social necessities come to assert themselves [...] even in the realm which according to convention human beings are really more or less in control, that is to say, in which they are not determined by their functions but enjoy a certain measure of freedom, they continue to be determined by the universal. So much so that even the most specific aspects of their individuality are pre-formed by the universal, and this includes even those elements that diverge from the universal history and freedom' (Adorno 2006, 70)

<sup>445</sup>(Adorno 1981, 'Introduction')

<http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/positivismusstreit/adorno-intro1.html>

<sup>446</sup>(Adorno 1981, 'Introduction')

<http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/positivismusstreit/adorno-intro1.html>

machines' have become 'the function of their own apparatus.'<sup>447</sup> For Adorno, this indicates the general predicament of social inversion, where 'while we imagine that we act as ourselves, in reality we act to a great extent as the agents of our own functions.'<sup>448</sup>

### 3.2 Subjective Domination

The concept of 'character masks' also indicates the way in which Adorno conceives the social domination of the subject. According to the dialectical logic of his social theory, the subjects that collectively constitute the inverted modality of capitalist society are themselves reciprocally constituted by the latter. In consequence, Adorno's theory of the social domination of the subject is objective. It also means that Adorno's analysis treats the subject as a fragment of totality that is mediated by the latter's supra-individual negative universality. On one level, Adorno's theory of social domination is therefore concerned with the constitution of individuals and with their forced integration into mass society. On another level, his analysis focuses on how individuals are maimed by the totality within which they are situated. On the former level he uses the Hegelian and Marxian elements of his supra-individual social theory to argue that the 'individual is a social category'; on the latter, he combines that theory with those of Heidegger's, Kant's and Freud's and thereby addresses the mutilation of subjects. Both are theorised in conjunction with Adorno's account of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction.

The subjective element of Adorno's Hegelian-Marxian conception of the supra-individual negative universality of social totality is employed as a means of theorising the constitution of the social category of the individual, and of thereby addressing the individual's constituent experience through the concepts of the 'bane' and the 'individualistic veil'.

The concept of the 'bane' marks the point in Adorno's fusion of Hegel and Marx at which the supra-individual elements of his social theory pass over into the subjective element in the form of the inverted internalisation of subject formation. This can be seen in the Hegelian element of the 'bane' – the latter is described as 'the

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<sup>447</sup>(Adorno 2001b) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1968/late-capitalism.htm>

<sup>448</sup>(Adorno 2006, 69)

subjective form of the world-spirit, whose primacy over the externalised life-process is reinforced internally'<sup>449</sup> – and in its Marxian element, which pertains to the sense in which the 'bane' is said to be reflective of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction.<sup>450</sup> Both of these elements cohere to express the paradox of the category of the individual, which is premised on the atomised behaviour dictated by totality. This atomised behaviour forcefully integrates the individual into totality, and forms the basis for reified and integrated consciousness.<sup>451</sup>

This theory of individuality is set out in Adorno's discussion of the 'individualist veil.' Individuality is described as a 'veil' because the individual subject is unaware of its constitution by totality. In Adorno's view, this means that individuality is 'illusory'; but at the same time, he holds that this illusion is integral to the constitution of totality, as it forms the grounds for the atomised and egoistic behaviour that is responsible for composing and perpetuating that totality. This behaviour is reflective of the way in which the very category of the individual is constitutive of the social domination of totality:

[T]he generality, through which every individual is determined as the unit [*Einheit*] of its particularity, is borrowed from what is external to it and hence also as heteronomous to the individual, as anything which demons were once said to afflict them with.<sup>452</sup>

The pernicious consequences of the individuals' determination by totality can be seen in Adorno's social criticism of Heidegger's, Freud's and Kant's theorisations of individualism. These criticisms should be described as *social* because Adorno interprets these theories in conjunction with the exchange abstraction, thereby casting them as representative of the individual's plight within the social totality.

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<sup>449</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'The Bane') <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

<sup>450</sup>'In human experience, the bane is the equivalent of the fetish-character of the commodity. What is self-made becomes the in-itself, out of which the self can no longer escape.' (Adorno 2001, 'The Bane')

<sup>451</sup> 'What they can do nothing about, and which negates them, is what they themselves become. While the nominalistic principle simulates individualization to them, they act collectively. This much is true in the Hegelian insistence on the universality of the particular, that the particular in the inverted form of powerless individualization, sacrificed to the general, is dictated by the principle of the inverted universality.' (Adorno 2001, 'The Bane') <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

<sup>452</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Spirit as Social Totality')  
<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

## Heidegger

Adorno thus interprets Heidegger's philosophical account of the existential malaise of the individual as indicative of a social situation in which the individual has been 'incapacitated.'<sup>453</sup> This is illustrated in Adorno's argument that Heidegger's categories, such as 'dasein'<sup>454</sup> and 'being', are reflective of the social situation in which the 'subject became to a large extent ideology'; a situation that 'conceals' the objective functional context of society.<sup>455</sup> Like Adorno's analysis of fetishism, Heidegger's philosophy is therefore both false and true: it is false in its trans-historical hypostatisation, but true insofar as Heidegger's philosophical categories are reflexive of the exchange abstraction that renders individuals powerless, and which causes them to suffer.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>453</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Incapacitation of the Subject')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/NDITrans.txt> Adorno criticises Heidegger for the fetishistic naturalisation of social conditions.

<sup>454</sup> 'What Hegel and Marx in their youth condemned as alienation and reification, and against which all are spontaneously united today, is what Heidegger interprets ontologically as well as unhistorically, and, in its function as a being-form of Dasein, as something bodily.' (Adorno 2002b, 107-108)

<sup>455</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Incapacitation of the Subject')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/NDITrans.txt>

<sup>456</sup> 'The lament over the loss of ordering forms increases with their power. The institutions are mightier than ever; they have long since produced something like the neon-lit style of the culture-industry, which spreads over the world like the Baroque style once did. The undiminished conflict between subjectivity and forms reverses itself under the hegemony of the latter into the consciousness which experiences itself as powerless, which no longer trusts itself to change the institutions and their intellectual mirror-images, into identification with the aggressor. The lament over the loss of forms in the world, the prelude to the call for a binding social order, which the subject tacitly expects from outside, heteronomously, is, insofar as the assertion is more than mere ideology, not the fruit of the emancipation of the subject but of its failure. What appears as formless to a constitution of the existent modeled solely after subjective reason is what subjugates the subjects, the pure principle of being-for-others, of the commodity-form. For the sake of universal equivalence and comparability it debases all qualitative determinations in all places, leveling tendentially. The same commodity-form however, the mediated domination of human beings over human beings, solidifies the subjects in their lack of autonomy; their autonomy and the freedom towards the qualitative would go together. (Adorno 2001, 'Weakness and Support' and 'Incapacitation of the Subject') <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/NDITrans.txt>

## **Freud**

Adorno's interpretation of Freud presents another account of the plight of the individual. Adorno uses Freudian concepts to explain how social totality has psychologically mutilated the individual. As a complement to the individualistic veil, Adorno argues that the human psyche is constituted by totality. The defence mechanism of narcissism, in his view, represses this reliance on totality and forms the basis for pseudo-individuation.

The category of pseudo-individuation grounds Adorno's analysis of how individuals are psychologically maimed by totality, and is articulated by way of a number of Freudian concepts. The process of socialisation makes individuals neurotic; their needs are repressed and displaced onto inadequate objects of substitution (commodified cultural forms); this leads to a generalisation of the Freudian social analysis that Adorno first presented in 'On the Fetish Character': namely, 'regression under the bane.'

Regression is thus theorised as the outcome of the reality principle, which is conditioned by the bane. This causes regression to be instantiated in pseudo-individuation and pseudo-activity. These conditions are ultimately symptomatic of a situation in which people have become reliant upon the very same totality that dominates and compels their behaviour, up to and including their most individual and intimate experiences.

## **Domination, Freedom and Self-Preservation**

These analyses of the social situation of the individual can be seen to be brought together in Adorno's interpretation of Kant. Adorno's social criticism of Kant also reflects the way in which Adorno sees social totality as constitutive of domination with freedom as exemplary of its negation. As is the case elsewhere, domination is aligned with the fetish form of the exchange abstraction, and freedom is posited in its overcoming.

Adorno's social criticism of Kant is again grounded on the relationship between the individual and society. In this instance, this relation is interpreted as reflective of the idea of self-preservation, and as being exemplified in Kant's notion of the

transcendental subject.<sup>457</sup> While '[s]ociety determines individuals, even according to their immanent genesis, as what they are', their determined actions 'appear under the veil of the *principium individuationis*.'<sup>458</sup> This is reflected in Adorno's social criticism of the Kantian transcendental subject. In Adorno's view, the transcendental subject 'far more determines the real conduct of people and society than do those psychological individuals from whom the transcendental project was abstracted [...] they have turned into appendages of the social machinery.'<sup>459</sup> This is because individuals are 'constrained' to behave like '*homo oeconomicus*.' The transcendental subject is thus reflexive of exchange, the rationality of which constitutes and deforms people at the outset, thereby 'maiming them.'<sup>460</sup>

This process of deformation is tied in with Adorno's deployment of the Freudian theory of ego-formation. Adorno conceives the ego as indicative of the compulsive character of the transcendental subject. These Kantian and Freudian elements lead people to hypostatise the idea of freedom, thereby conflating it with the determined behaviour of the individuating principle, and to act in atomised, instrumental and 'radically evil' ways to ensure their own self-preservation.<sup>461</sup> This conception of freedom reflects the formal freedom that allows the genesis of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction. At the same time, it is indicative of the inverted compulsion that the fetish form of the exchange abstraction compels.<sup>462</sup> Such a

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<sup>457</sup> (Adorno 2001, 'Nominalist Aspect')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND3Trans.txt>

<sup>458</sup> (Adorno 2001, 'Freedom and Organised Society')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND3Trans.txt>.

<sup>459</sup> (Adorno 1983, 250)

<sup>460</sup> 'The doctrine of the transcendental subject faithfully discloses the precedence of the abstraction, rational relations that are abstracted from individuals and their conditions and for which exchange is the model. If the standard structure of society is the exchange form, its rationality constitutes people: what they are for themselves, what they think they are, is secondary.' (Adorno 1983, 250)

<sup>461</sup> 'The individuated feels free, insofar as it is opposed to society and may undertake something against it or other individuals, although incomparably less than it believes. Its freedom is primarily that of pursuing its own ends, which are not immediately exhausted in social ones; to this extent it coincides with the principle of individuation.' (Adorno 2001, 'Self-experience of Freedom and Unfreedom'), <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND3Trans.txt>.

<sup>462</sup> 'Freedom of this type has escaped the natural-rootedness of society; within an increasingly rational one it has achieved a degree of reality. At the same time it remains appearance [*Schein*] in the midst of bourgeois society, no less than individuality generally. The critique of the freedom of the will, like that of determinism, means critique of this appearance [*Schein*]. The law of value realises itself over the heads of

condition is based on the peculiarity of the social constitution of domination; 'human beings are unfree in their bondage to what is external, and that which is external to them is in turn also themselves.'<sup>463</sup>

This condition of unfreedom becomes the basis for a conception of freedom as the negation of unfreedom: 'Subjects become aware of the limits of their freedom as their own membership in nature, ultimately as their powerlessness in view of the society, becomes autonomous before them.'<sup>464</sup> This conception of freedom is metapsychologically derived as the 'polemical counter-image to the suffering under social compulsion.'<sup>465</sup> It is also grounded in the limits of the subsuming powers of the commodity-form. The latter reaches its limit in its determination of that which ultimately determines it in turn: labour power.<sup>466</sup> Furthermore, and by extension, this notion of freedom is also premised on the negation of exchange and social totality.

In sum, Adorno's dialectical social theory of domination uses his theory of the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction to theorise supra-individual forms of social domination, and to thereby articulate the ways in which these forms invert to compel, condition and maim individuals to the point where they become reliant on the very forms that oppress them. This dialectical social theory is summarised as a whole in *Negative Dialectics*:

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formally free individuals. They are unfree, according to Marx's insight, as its involuntary executors, and indeed all the more thoroughly, the more the social antagonisms grow, in which the conception of freedom first formed. The process by which what is individuated becomes autonomous, the function of the exchange-society, terminates in its abolition through integration. What produced freedom, recoils into unfreedom.' (Adorno 2001, 'Self-experience of freedom and unfreedom')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND3Trans.txt>

<sup>463</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Freedom and Organised Society')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND3Trans.txt>

<sup>464</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Freedom and Organised Society')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND3Trans.txt>

<sup>465</sup>(Adorno 2001, 'Pre-egoised Impulse')

<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND3Trans.txt>

<sup>466</sup> 'Determinism acts as if dehumanization, the commodity character of labor-power developed into a totality, were human essence pure and simple, incognizant of the fact that the commodity character finds its borders in labour-power, which is not mere exchange-value but also has use-value. If the freedom of the will is merely denied, then human beings are reduced without reservations to the normal form of the commodity character of their labour in developed capitalism. No less topsy-turvy is aprioristic determinism as the doctrine of the freedom of the will, which in the middle of commodity society abstracts from this.' (Adorno 2001, 'Self experience of Freedom and Unfreedom') <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND3Trans.txt>



[T]he economic process, which reduces individual interests to the common denominator of a totality, which remains negative, because it distances itself by means of its constitutive abstraction from the individual interests, out of which it is nevertheless simultaneously composed. The universality, which reproduces the preservation of life, simultaneously endangers it, on constantly more threatening levels. The violence of the self-realizing universal is not, as Hegel thought, identical to the essence of individuals, but always also contrary. They are not merely character-masks, agents of value, in some presumed special sphere of the economy. Even where they think they have escaped the primacy of the economy, all the way down to their psychology, the *maison tolère*, [French: universal home] of what is unknowably individual, they react under the compulsion of the generality; the more identical they are with it, the more un-identical they are with it in turn as defenceless followers. What is expressed in the individuals themselves, is that the whole preserves itself along with them only by and through the antagonism.<sup>467</sup>

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1 Summary

Adorno's conception of fetishism is therefore integral to his critical theory of social domination, accounting for its social constitution and its constituent properties. As I have shown, this conception of fetishism and social domination is not based on Lukács nor does it consist in Adorno's theory of reification. Instead, Adorno's theory can be said to unfold in two phases. Firstly, the early phase conceives of fetishism and social domination in conjunction with his Marxian interpretation of Lukács, Benjamin and the relationship between natural history and the commodity-form. This is exemplified in Adorno's macrological studies of fetishism, which account for the constituent properties and disclose the unintentional constitution of social domination. In his later work, Adorno's theory of social domination is based on his conception of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction, which provides a more fully-fledged account of social constitution and forms the basis for the constituent properties of his dialectical theory of social domination. In both instances, the constitution of these theories of social domination are accounted for in Adorno's use of fetishism, while their constituent properties differ from Lukács' theory of reification, and surpass designation as identity thinking, or Adorno's definition of reification. There are however a number of problems with Adorno's account that undermine his dialectical

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<sup>467</sup> (Adorno 2001, 'Law and Fairness')  
<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND4Trans.txt>

critical theory of society and the theory of social domination it encapsulates. In what follows I outline the place of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction in critical theory and then I move to show how Adorno's insufficient account of the social genesis and derivation of the exchange abstraction undermines his critical theory and his account of social domination.

## 4.2 Critical Social Theory

Since Adorno's conception of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction serves as the basis for this dialectical theory of social domination and his conception of freedom, it also serves as the basis of his critical social theory. In this capacity, exchange's function as the socially constitutive element of dialectical social totality provides Adorno's theory with a socially synthetic foundation that is able to grasp any element of totality in relation to the mechanism of exchange that mediates or reflects it. Adorno's criticism of this social totality is founded on what he terms the identity of non-identity, or the equivalence of non-equivalence. This forms part of his account of the interrelation of the exchange abstraction's fetish form and identity thinking.<sup>468</sup> Adorno's theory of exchange is thus the means through which criticism becomes a dialectical critical theory of society. This is because such a critical theory 'coincides with a perception of the way in which the objective structure is itself conceptually determined', so that 'the concept of exchange is, as it were, the hinge connecting the

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<sup>468</sup> Adorno conceives of this type of criticism as faithfully following Marx's method of immanent critique: 'Marx is concerned with an immanent critique of liberalism. In the East, Marx serves the interests of power relations, this Marx belongs to the sphere of pulp literature. In the West, Marx is accused that his theory is premised on subjective-proletarian class consciousness. This is precisely what is not meant. Liberal theory is confronted with its own claim with regard to the act of exchange. "You say that equivalents are exchanged, that there is a free and just exchange, I take your word, now we shall see how this works." This is immanent critique. That man becomes a commodity has been perceived by others. Marx: "These petrified conditions must be made to dance by singing to them their own melody." (Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*) Not: to confront capitalist society a different one, but: to ask if society conforms to its own rules, if society functions according to laws which it claims as its own. Now, Marx does not just say, no, this is wrong, but he takes dialectic seriously and coquets with its terminology. In an exchange, something is the same and simultaneously not the same, it is and at the same time is not above board.' (Backhaus 2001, 5)

<http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/adorno-1962-seminar-on-marx/>

conception of a critical theory of society to the construction of the concept of society as a totality.<sup>469</sup>

On this basis Adorno's critical theory 'seeks to give a name to what secretly holds the machinery together'<sup>470</sup> by disclosing the 'non-identical' moments that a totality based on exchange does not recognise.<sup>471</sup> This makes theory critical in two senses: it reveals how society is constituted by showing how essence appears and hides itself in the pervasive fetish forms of domination that shape social life, and it demonstrates that these social forms are reliant upon and mask non-identical moments.

These elements are also tied into a third element of Adorno's critical social theory: namely, the idea of natural history presented in *Negative Dialectics*. In this interpretation, natural history is conceived as a critical concept that operates in conjunction with Marx's theory of fetishism. These theories are doubly critical. On the one hand, they use pejorative terms, such as fetishism and second nature, to describe the domination inherent within purportedly civilised societies. On the other, they denaturalise and de-fetishise these societies by pointing out their historicity.

Consequently, critical social theory sides with freedom and the idea of a just society. Such a society would be derived from the negation of social totality, and from the abolition of the exchange abstraction that is constitutive and constituted by that totality.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> (Adorno 1981, 'Sociology and Empirical Research')

<http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/positivismusstreit/adorno-empirical.html>

<sup>470</sup> (Adorno 1981, 'Sociology and Empirical Research')

<http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/positivismusstreit/adorno-empirical.html>

<sup>471</sup> 'The totality is to be opposed by convicting it of the non-identity with itself, which it denies according to its own concept. Negative dialectics is thereby tied, at its starting-point, to the highest categories of identity-philosophy. To this extent it also remains false, identity-logical, itself that which it is being thought against. (Adorno 2001, 'On the Dialectics of Identity') <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

<sup>472</sup> 'What the critique of the exchange-principle as the identifying one of thought wishes, is that the ideal of free and fair exchange, until today a mere pretext, would be realised. This alone would transcend the exchange. Once critical theory has demystified this latter as something which proceeds by equivalents and yet not by equivalents, then the critique of the inequality in the equality aims towards equality, amidst all skepticism against the rancor in the bourgeois egalitarian ideal, which tolerates nothing qualitatively divergent. If no human being was deprived of their share of their living labor, then rational identity would be achieved, and society would be beyond the identifying thought.' (Adorno 2001, 'On the Dialectics of Identity') <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

### 4.3 Evaluation

However, there are a number of problems with Adorno's account of social constitution and the formation of the constituent properties of social domination that undermine this critical theory.

The most fundamental problem is that Adorno's theory of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction is insufficiently theorised. In contrast to Lukács, Adorno does not confuse objectification and the abstract and autonomous properties of the social objectivity of things. He also distinguishes between reified social relations, fetishism and reified consciousness lending some complexity to elements of his theory of social domination through his accounts of social compulsion, the formation of subjectivity and psychological maiming. His use of exchange to link different fragments of society also provides a potentially fruitful basis for a unitary social theory. However, an explanation of the genesis of exchange and the extent of its pervasiveness is never really given.

At one point in *Negative Dialectics* Adorno implies that his theory of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction is taken from Alfred Sohn-Rethel.<sup>473</sup> This has led some to claim that Adorno's theory is taken from Sohn-Rethel. Yet as Helmut Reichelt points out, Adorno had problems with Sohn-Rethel's theory of real abstraction.<sup>474</sup> In Adorno's view, a 'systematic comprehensive analysis of the exchange abstraction' was still 'required.' However, Adorno never attempted this comprehensive analysis himself, whilst still using the theory in the manner shown above, a move which is indicative of the problems with his critical social theory of domination.

This is because the closest Adorno came to a systematic analysis took the form of a series of only partial expositions on Marx's theory of exchange (summarised

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<sup>473</sup> 'Alfred Sohn-Rethel was the first to point out that in the latter, in the general and necessary activity of the Spirit, inalienably social labor lies hidden.'

<sup>474</sup> Hence some letters, after those quoted by (Toscano 2011) in Adorno and Sohn Rethel's correspondence, show Adorno's difference with Sohn-Rethel (Adorno 1989, p. 221) This contrasts with his earlier euphoric comments in a letter dated 17th November 1936: 'Dear Alfred, I don't think I am exaggerating if I tell you that your letter was responsible for the greatest intellectual shock I have experienced in philosophy since I first encountered Benjamin's work – and that was in 1923! This shock reflects the magnitude and power of your idea – but also the depth of an agreement which goes immeasurably further than you could have suspected or even I myself could have foreseen'. (Adorno and Sohn- Rethel 1991, 32)

above).<sup>475</sup> As I have shown, these expositions provide an account of how the fetish form of the exchange abstraction is realised in exchange. They do not however account for Adorno's modification of Marx's theory through its fusion of Hegel, or for his transformation of Marxian categories, such as exchange and fetishism. Nor does Adorno provide an account of how these categories are indicative of virtually all aspects of social life.

As we have seen, Adorno provides ample material to map how exchange holds society together. However, he does not fully explicate why and how exchange and abstraction gain these socially pervasive powers. The closest he comes is in an assertion in the *Positivist Dispute* that attempts to base his social theory on what he characterises as the immanent, logical and contradictory nature of exchange. This is not however sufficiently elaborated into an account of how exchange possesses these immanent, logical and contradictory properties, or indeed in how it functions to constitute a conceptuality that 'holds sway in reality.'

This is why Adorno's attempt to utilise some of Marx's categories in relation to his category of exchange whilst neglecting other important ones is problematic: for instead of the development of the categories of abstract labour, value, surplus value and capital that are, as we have seen, central to Marx's theory of fetishism and social domination, Adorno opts for a socialised Hegelian reading of Marx. This involves a dialectically conceived notion of exchange, understood in relation to late capitalist social totality. Yet in this interrelated reading of Hegel and Marx, how and why exchange possesses its socially determinate function, and how it relates to late capitalist totality, is not sufficiently explained; instead it is interpreted and presupposed as an already existent feature of a totality that is not intelligible as a whole, whilst the dialectical function of totality is accounted for through Adorno's comments on the properties and pervasiveness of exchange.<sup>476</sup>

For, as has been shown, Adorno falls back on analysing these aspects of society through modified Marxian terms, such as fetishism, exchange, exchange-value, etc., or by treating these phenomena as harmonious or reflective of exchange. Yet, these deficiencies in his accounts of the genesis of exchange and of its pervasiveness mean

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<sup>475</sup> The lengthiest of these were summarised above. See also Adorno's comments on the fetish form of the exchange abstraction (Adorno 1981; Adorno 2002a)

<sup>476</sup> (Reichelt 2001) attempts to remedy these deficiencies by basing Adorno's social theory on his interpretation of Marx's idea of social validity.

that he does not conclusively show how or why the latter mediates them. This lack of a theory of the genesis and pervasiveness of the exchange abstraction thus undermines Adorno's analysis of society. This means that it also undermines the basis of his criticism and critical theory of society. Criticising economic exchange transactions as the unequal exchange of equivalents reliant on categories like surplus-value is one thing; but it is not apparent in Adorno's account of exchange if or how this basis can be generalised to other social and conceptual phenomena, let alone serve as ground for their criticism. This concern seems particularly pertinent if an account of the genesis of these phenomena is not provided, and if an explication of their embeddedness within relationships of equivalence and non-equivalence, of identity and non-identity, is similarly absent. The same is the case for the multitude of objective and subjective phenomena Adorno interprets as reflective or mediated by exchange. A lack of such an account also undermines Adorno's definition of how the critical theory of society relies on exchange. For if exchange is not comprehensively defined, then the theory it is based on, loses its critical acumen.<sup>477</sup>

These problems are further undermined by Adorno's comments, presented elsewhere, which express hostility to an objective theory of society.<sup>478</sup> Adorno often uses such comments to advocate his method of constellation;<sup>479</sup> or his points that society is 'intelligible' and 'unintelligible'<sup>480</sup>, yet they also contradict his contentions that the fetish form of the exchange abstraction objectively constitutes society. This also undermines the fact that a great many of Adorno's constellations, as I have shown, are reliant upon his theory of exchange. Furthermore, while his speculative anthropology may serve the purpose of ideological intervention against what Adorno terms the

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<sup>477</sup> In this regard (Rose 1979; Moishe Postone 1996) and Fetscher's point that Adorno's theory is hampered by the absence of concrete labour and surplus value is only partially valid. This is because it is hard to imagine how the inclusion of these categories could ground and explicate everything Adorno relates to exchange.

<sup>478</sup> See for instance (Adorno 2001b)

<sup>479</sup> 'Precisely the increasing tendency of integration of the capitalist system however, whose moments intertwine into a constantly more complete functional context, makes the old question concerning the cause as opposed to the constellation ever more precarious; not the critique of epistemology, but the real course of history necessitates the search for constellations.' (Adorno 2001, 'Constellation as Science') <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>

<sup>480</sup> (T. W. Adorno 1981, 'Sociology and Empirical Research')

<http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/positivismusstreit/adorno-empirical.html>

concept of the root,<sup>481</sup> it also often comes into contradiction with the strand of his theory that roots domination in exchange. This is also the case for several comments Adorno makes which characterise exchange as having occurred since 'time immemorial'<sup>482</sup> casting doubt on whether his analysis of exchange is specific to the social relations of capitalism, going against statements made elsewhere that it is, and undermining the historical account also outlined above that treats the properties of exchange as an all-around mediator as the outcome of particular historical and social conditions.

Adorno attempts to bypass these problems by placing the various strands of his theory into totality. This makes totality the basis of causality.<sup>483</sup> By doing so he ends up in a similar position to Lukács, as he presupposes the function of totality without explicating its genesis or its function. Instead, like Lukács, he presupposes the dialectical properties of totality, and thereby links it to various phenomena. This means that rather than an account of how totality is socially constituted through exchange and how it possesses dominating powers by virtue of the autonomous properties of the autonomous function of the exchange abstraction, Adorno ultimately treats totality as a sort of *deus ex machina* to account for the composition, the constituent properties

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<sup>481</sup> See (Adorno 2001, 'Outset from the Concept')

<sup>482</sup> 'For the exchange of equivalents was based since time immemorial exactly on this, that something unequal was exchanged in its name, that the surplus-value of labor was appropriated' (Adorno 2001, 'On the Dialectics of Identity')  
<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt>.

<sup>483</sup> 'Causality has withdrawn as it were into the totality; in the midst of its system it becomes indistinguishable. The more its concept, under scientific mandate, dilutes itself to abstraction, the less the simultaneous threads of the universally socialised society, which are condensed to an extreme, permit one condition to be traced back with evidence to others. Each one hangs together horizontally as vertically with all others, tinctures all, is tintured by all. The latest doctrine in which enlightenment employed causality as a decisive political weapon, the Marxist one of superstructure and infrastructure, lags almost innocently behind a condition, in which the apparatuses of production, distribution and domination, as well as economic and social relations and ideologies are inextricably interwoven, and in which living human beings have turned into bits of ideology. Where these latter are no longer added to the existent as something justifying or complementary, but pass over into the appearance [*Schein*], that what is, would be inescapable and thereby legitimated, the critique which operates with the unequivocal causal relation of superstructure and infrastructure aims wide of the mark. In the total society everything is equally close to the midpoint; it is as transparent, its apologetics as threadbare, as those who see through it, who die out.' (Adorno 2001, 'On the Crisis of Causality')  
<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ND2Trans.txt> This seems to be another variant of the objective theory of society he has criticised elsewhere.

and the function of his social theory. As such, this conception of totality and its function as negative universality provides the link between disparate phenomena and theories which Adorno interprets as reflective of society whilst also serving to reconcile antagonistic and contradictory elements of his theory. Finally, it also serves as the means of accounting for the pervasiveness of exchange and the function of its autonomous and abstract fetishistic properties. Yet with so much hanging on the category, like the fetish form of the exchange abstraction, it likewise lacks an account of how it is constituted, how it functions to reproduce itself and it incorporates or reflects different theories of dialectics and different aspects of an eclectic array of theorists.<sup>484</sup>

This means that despite moments of descriptive insight, and despite his presentation of a theorisation of exchange that serves as a potential means of addressing the social cohesion of domination, by virtue of this lack of a fully-fledged account of the constitution, constituent derivation and function of exchange and social totality and a systematic account of how the two relate to each other - Adorno's critical theory falls short of providing an account of the social constitution and the constituent properties of that mode of domination, and thereby rather than being a critical theory of a particular society, it runs the risk of simply being a critical theory of society as such.

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<sup>484</sup> In this regard Rose, Postone and Fetscher's point that Adorno's theory is hampered by the absence of concrete labour and surplus-value is only partially valid. This is because it is hard to imagine how the inclusion of these categories could ground everything that Adorno relates to exchange.



## **4. Lefebvre, Fetishism as Concrete Abstraction and Socially Embodied Domination.**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I turn to the role of fetishism in Henri Lefebvre's theory of social domination. I argue that Lefebvre's Hegelian interpretation of Marx conceives fetishism as a 'concrete abstraction' that articulates the constitution and constituent properties of Marx's theory of social domination. I also argue that this conception of fetishism forms the basis of three attempts by Lefebvre to supplement Marx's theory with an account of how these abstract properties of domination are composed, embedded and opposed in social life. I show this in what I designate as three phases of Lefebvre's work. I close with an evaluation of Lefebvre's theory of fetishism and social domination.

### **I Literature Review**

My focus in this chapter differs from the leading commentary on Lefebvre, which characterises his thought thematically by casting it as being paradigmatic of the theory of alienation. It is also the case that the historical and theoretical works on Western Marxism either ignore Lefebvre, or at best include only marginal references to his work.<sup>485</sup> For this reason the comparative study of Lefebvre presented in this thesis is the first sustained comparison of Lefebvre with Lukács and Adorno. However, my position places me alongside several recent analyses of particular aspects

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<sup>485</sup> See (Jay 1986; Anderson 1979; Jacoby 1971; Kolakowski 1978a) For a recent historical work that gives prominence to Lefebvre, see (Schechter 2008)

of Lefebvre's Marxism. Because of this, and in a manner that differs from the previous chapters of this thesis, this present chapter will not differentiate Lefebvre's theory of fetishism from the popular interpretations thereof. Rather than offering a different interpretation, my aim instead will be to draw out and discuss elements of this material that have, as yet, received far less attention than they require and warrant. These aspects of Lefebvre's work will be shown to possess similarities and differences with the positions I developed in my chapters on Marx, Lukács and Adorno.

### **1.1 Domination as Alienation**

These elements of Lefebvre's thought have not been focused on because the majority of Anglophone commentary interprets Lefebvre's Marxism in the context of the debate between Althusserian and humanist interpretations of Marx.<sup>486</sup> Lefebvre is thus portrayed as a seminal Marxist-humanist theorist and as the 'reign[ing] prophet of alienation.'<sup>487</sup> Consequently, as can be seen in Jay, the 'key concept of alienation' is treated as 'the centrepiece of his widely influential reading of Marx.'<sup>488</sup> This depiction faithfully accounts for Lefebvre's early writings, his polemics with Althusser, and also describes several of the characteristics of Lefebvre's later theory of social domination. Yet this line of commentary is not concerned with a sustained examination of the content of Lefebvre's Marxism, or with analysing how Lefebvre's theory of alienation fits into his theory of the constitution of social domination. Finally, it does not address Lefebvre's conception of fetishism or 'concrete abstraction.' This commentary is therefore not concerned with how Lefebvre's interpretation of fetishism factors into his theory of the constitution and the constituent properties of social domination. Rather, by focusing on the thematic characteristics of alienation, it neglects that (a) Lefebvre's earlier writings conceive of alienation in relation to the concrete abstraction of commodity fetishism in order to construct a theory of how domination is socially embedded,<sup>489</sup> and (b) that Lefebvre's later theoretical accounts move away from his

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<sup>486</sup> See (Jay 1986), (Elden 2004), (Merrifield 2006), (Shields 1999), (Anderson 1979), (Shields 1999)

<sup>487</sup> (Merrifield 2006, XXXII)

<sup>488</sup> (Jay 1986)

<sup>489</sup> See for example Jay's treatment of Lefebvre which: (1) relies entirely on his earlier works, such as *Dialectical Materialism*. (2) Refrains from discussing how Lefebvre conceives of the social constitution of alienation in his early work: 'The general

classic Marxist-humanist theory of alienation to utilise other means of conceptualising domination in relation to Lefebvre's theory of the concrete abstraction of fetishism.

## 1.2 Specific Studies of Lefebvre

However, several recent works that examine the particular theoretical aspects of Lefebvre's Marxism provide a solid basis from which to differentiate his interpretation of Marx from this thematic humanist interpretation.<sup>490</sup> Greig Charnock's *Challenging New State Spatialities: The Open Marxism of Henri Lefebvre*,<sup>491</sup> points to the importance of dialectical critique, alienation and fetishism in Lefebvre's Marxism.<sup>492</sup> John Roberts provides an incisive analysis of Lefebvre in his work on everyday life<sup>493</sup>; Lukas Stanek's *Henri Lefebvre on Space*<sup>494</sup> provides an excellent examination of how Lefebvre's concept of abstract space draws on Lefebvre's Hegelian Marxist idea of concrete abstraction. By doing so, Stanek provides an analysis of Lefebvre's theory of social domination that does not simply treat it in terms of alienation. Yet Stanek does not show how Lefebvre's concept of abstract space relates to Lefebvre's earlier theories of concrete abstraction. Consequently, there is still room for a work that adequately focuses on the role that Lefebvre's concept of concrete abstraction plays in the composition and characteristics of his theory of social domination, which I discuss in this chapter. In doing so I will also show how Lefebvre's conception of fetishism and social domination has parallels with that of Marx, Lukács and Adorno.

I begin by discussing Lefebvre's non-dogmatic and non-systematic interpretation of Marx, and outline his Hegelian-Marxist interpretation of Marx's critical dialectical method and his theory of social constitution and social domination *qua* his interpretation of praxis and alienation. I then show how Lefebvre's conception of

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argument of *Dialectical Materialism*, which has since become common coin among Marxist Humanists, does not bear repeating.'

<sup>490</sup> In addition (Merrifield 2006) includes a number of essays that focus on particular aspects of Lefebvre's thought in conjunction with his interpretation of Marx. (Roberts 2006) also provides an excellent discussion of Lefebvre in the context of theories of everyday life, while (Osborne 2011) touches upon Lefebvre's theory.

<sup>491</sup> (Charnock 2010) Such an emphasis also differentiates Lefebvre from his Marxist interpreters such as David Harvey.

<sup>492</sup> This is done by comparing the similarities Lefebvre's thought has with the stream of thinkers in the school of 'Open Marxism.'

<sup>493</sup> (J. Roberts 2006)

<sup>494</sup> (Stanek 2011)

fetishism fuses these elements to account for the constitution and constituent properties of fetishism as an autonomous and alien concrete abstraction that inverts to dominate, but not entirely determine social life. I draw out this interpretation by demonstrating how Lefebvre differentiates his conception of fetishism and social domination from Lukács and critical theory.

I then move to demonstrate how Lefebvre's interpretation of the concrete abstraction of fetishism fits into his theory of social domination. I argue that it serves as the basis for three attempts in which Lefebvre tries to supplement his interpretation of Marx's theory by providing an account of how domination is constructed, embedded and resisted in social life. I argue that phase one consists in the classic humanist Hegelian-Marxist phase of Lefebvre's critique of everyday life. In this phase, Lefebvre conceives social domination in everyday life by way of the constitution of the concrete abstraction of fetishism. He theorises the characteristics of domination in everyday life by linking it to the concrete abstraction of fetishism as the objective and subjective alienation of the human essence of the 'total man'.<sup>495</sup>

I then demonstrate that phase two consists of Lefebvre's reformulation of the critique of everyday life. In this phase, Lefebvre moves away from his classic Marxist-humanist conception of social domination. Lefebvre's model of everyday life is rendered more complex and the notion of total man is replaced with a typology of social alienation. Finally, the central categories of Lefebvre's Hegelian-Marxism are modified and augmented. However, the notion of the concrete abstraction of fetishism still serves as the basis for the composition and characteristics of a typology of objective 'terroristic forms' of domination that are parallel to the concrete abstraction of commodity fetishism. Lefebvre's writings on cities and space mark a third phase in the evolution of this strand. These writings provide an attempt to embed Lefebvre's theoretical interests in more concrete forms by using his conception of 'concrete abstraction' to theorise how domination is constituted, socially embedded and opposed in the production of the urban form of cities. Finally, I show how his theory of the production of space synthesises these writings on cities and everyday life. In doing so, I consider how concrete abstraction is instantiated and resisted in social life through the category of abstract space. I also show how each of these phases of

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<sup>495</sup> As I discuss below, this term is used in Lefebvre's early work such as *Dialectical Materialism* and *The Critique of Everyday Life* to conceive of humanity in an un-alienated state.

Lefebvre's theory is marked by what I term his dualistic opposition, which accounts for the internal resistance between form and content by way of a schematic opposition between quantity and quality.

I close by considering how these theories construe social domination and I provide some criticisms of Lefebvre's methodology and conception of social domination.

## **2. Lefebvre's non-systematic Marxism**

What I will term Lefebvre's non-systematic interpretation of Marx is the basis for a voluminous and wide array of subjects that Lefebvre covered in the more than 60 books that he authored. In these works, Marx's theory is 'not a system or dogma' for Lefebvre, but rather a 'reference'<sup>496</sup> and a 'starting point that is indispensable for understanding the present-day world.'<sup>497</sup> This is indicative of Lefebvre's treatment of Marxism in which the 'basic concepts have to be elaborated, refined, and complemented by other concepts where necessary.'<sup>498</sup> As I will show, one strand of Lefebvre's work concerns how these basic concepts are conceived, refined and complemented in his conception of fetishism and its role in his attempts to articulate how domination is socially instantiated. Before doing so I will provide an overview of the interpretation of Marx that Lefebvre draws on.

Lefebvre's interpretation of the relationship between Hegel and Marx forms the basis of his Marxism. This relationship is designated as 'dialectical' by Lefebvre. In making this claim Lefebvre states that Marx 'continues' and 'breaks', 'extends' and 'transforms' the Hegelian method.<sup>499</sup> This is particularly the case for logic and dialectics and 'certain concepts (totality, negativity, alienation).'<sup>500</sup> Such a characterisation is reflected in Lefebvre's influential account of how Marx stands Hegel on his head. Whereas Hegel's method is idealist and mystifies reality, Lefebvre holds that Marx's dialectical materialist method uses the Hegelian categories of totality, negativity and alienation in his 'radical critique' of social praxis,<sup>501</sup> thereby demonstrating 'how

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<sup>496</sup>(Lefebvre 1988, 77)

<sup>497</sup>(Lefebvre 1988, 77)

<sup>498</sup>(Osborne 2011, 19)

<sup>499</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 25)

<sup>500</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 17)

<sup>501</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 4)

dialectical reason arises precisely from [...] practical social activity, by man as he is in everyday life.'

Due to this interpretation, the theories of praxis and alienation are central to Lefebvre's interpretation of Marx. Praxis serves as a broad category which Lefebvre defines as the 'dialectical relation between man and nature, consciousness and thing.'<sup>502</sup> This conception of praxis thus serves as Lefebvre's underlying theory of how society is constituted as an objective and subjective social process that is a 'manifestation' of 'man's practical activity, seen as a whole (praxis).' Thus, in contrast to Hegel's idealism, the Marxian category of praxis forms the basis of 'true materialism', and discloses the 'practical relations inherent in organized human existence and studies them inasmuch as they are concrete conditions of existence for cultures or ways of life.'<sup>503</sup> The 'Fundamental idea' of this conception of praxis is that '[s]ocial relationships (including juridical relations of ownership and property) constitute the core of the social whole.' These relations also 'structure it, [and] serve as intermediary (that which mediates) between the foundation or 'substructure' (the productive forces, the division of labour) and the 'superstructures' (institutions, ideologies).'<sup>504</sup> Thus Lefebvre's conception of social constitution is based on this broad conception of social praxis.

Alienation complements the category of praxis by articulating the constituent properties of all previous societies constituted by social praxis. This conception of alienation is likewise illustrated by Lefebvre's comparison of Hegel with Marx. Whereas Hegel's account of alienation in the *Phenomenology* is 'a 'disguised' and mystified critical analysis of these essences and moments of the mind',<sup>505</sup> in Marx's materialist conception of praxis, humanity is 'alienated by being temporarily dominated by a world that is 'other' even though he himself gave birth to it, and [is therefore] equally real.'<sup>506</sup> According to Lefebvre, Marx therefore modifies the Hegelian theory of alienation so as to conceive it as the 'single yet dual movement of objectification and externalization – of realization and derealisation'. This means that while objectification is necessary – 'he [man, i.e. humanity] must *objectify* himself'<sup>507</sup> – it takes on an alienated form in capitalism, as 'social objects become things, fetishes, which turn upon

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<sup>502</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 45)

<sup>503</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 48)

<sup>504</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 7)

<sup>505</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 51-52)

<sup>506</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 51-52)

<sup>507</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 71)

him ['man']'.<sup>508</sup> As a consequence, and as I will now show, in interpreting fetishism as a 'concrete abstraction' Lefebvre fuses these theories of praxis and alienation, and thereby develops an account of Marx's theory of the composition and characteristics of social domination. Lefebvre's conception of fetishism entails this fusion because in his view, '[t]he economic theory of Fetishism takes up again, raises to a higher level and makes explicit the philosophical theory of alienation and the 'reification' of the individual.'<sup>509</sup> Fetishism is thus conceived as a concrete abstraction that is constituted by social praxis and that is constitutive of social domination.

## 2.1 Fetishism as Concrete Abstraction

This notion of fetishism as a concrete abstraction likewise stems from Lefebvre's interpretation of Marx's relationship to Hegel. Following from this contrast between idealism and praxis, the 'starting point' for such a conception of abstraction is not the mind but practical activity.<sup>510</sup> Thus social praxis, which consists of 'social reality, i.e. interacting human individuals and groups', constitutes *appearances* which are something more and else than mere illusions.<sup>511</sup> These 'appearances are the modes in which human activities manifest themselves within the whole they constitute at any given moment.'<sup>512</sup> They are therefore what Lefebvre terms 'modalities of consciousness', or 'concrete abstractions' because these forms are 'abstract' yet they are also 'concrete'<sup>513</sup> since they are constituted by social praxis. Consequently, these concrete abstractions are 'the very basis of the objectivity of the economic, historical and social process which has led up to modern capitalism.' Furthermore, they are indicative of capitalism, as within the latter they function as 'practical power'.<sup>514</sup> This is because these economic categories 'have a concrete, objective reality: historically (as moments of the social reality) and actually (as elements of the social objectivity).'<sup>515</sup> These points are summarised in Lefebvre's exposition of how the commodity is

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<sup>508</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 71) Like Adorno, in contrast to Lukács, Lefebvre thus distinguishes between alienation and objectification.

<sup>509</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 84)

<sup>510</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 77)

<sup>511</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 54)

<sup>512</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 54)

<sup>513</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 54)

<sup>514</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 125)

<sup>515</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 125)

composed by social relations. His discussion also signals how the commodity possesses the properties of social domination by inverting to mediate the relations that collectively constitute them where the objective and abstract properties that the commodity possesses are exemplary of Lefebvre's interpretation of fetishism:

Once launched into existence, the commodity involves and envelops the social relations between living men. It develops, however, with its own laws and imposes its own consequences, and then men can enter into relations with one another only by way of products, through commodities and the market, through the currency and money. Human relations seem to be nothing more than relations between things. But this is far from being the case; or rather it is only partly true. In actual fact, the living relations between individuals in the different groups and between these groups themselves are made manifest by these relations between things: in money relations and the exchange of products. Conversely, these relations between things and abstract quantities are only the appearance and expression of human relations in a determinate mode of production, in which individuals (competitors) and groups (classes) are in conflict or contradiction. The direct and immediate relations of human individuals are enveloped and supplanted by mediate and abstract relations, which mask them. The objectivity of the commodity, the market and money is both an appearance and a reality. It tends to function as an objectivity independent of men.<sup>516</sup>

Consequently, fetishism is also treated by Lefebvre as being constitutive of social domination, as its abstract, autonomous, quantitative and alienated properties invert and thereby intervene in society:

Fetishism properly so called only appeared when abstractions escaped the control of the thought and will of man. Thus commercial value and money are only in themselves quantitative abstractions: abstract expressions of social, human relations; but these abstractions materialize, intervene as entities in social life and in history, and end by dominating instead of being dominated.<sup>517</sup>

In Lefebvre's interpretation, fetishism is not simply the property of the commodity, but is compounded in Marx's analysis where its autonomous and inverted properties become more pronounced. Lefebvre perceives that in the deployment of each category in Marx's presentation in *Capital* 'there corresponds a new degree of economic objectivity' which is 'more real because it dominates living men more brutally'<sup>518</sup> Thus, 'more even than the commodity, money and capital weigh down on

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<sup>516</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 76)

<sup>517</sup> Lefebvre quoted in (Poster 1975, 71)

<sup>518</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 83/84)



human relations from outside.’<sup>519</sup> Fetishism is therefore constitutive of a supra-individual type of social domination. This domination is characterised as a state of inversion in which collectively constituted ‘objects therefore determine [...] socio-economic Becoming and the social activity.’ This is because ‘social objects, such as commodities’ and their exchange on ‘the market [exercise...] a power over human beings exactly like that of the realities of the uncontrolled sector of Nature.’<sup>520</sup> As a result, the concrete abstractions of commodities, money and capital ‘impose certain determinations on activity’ and ‘continue to determine struggles and contradictions within man's activity,’ from which emerge the ‘struggles of certain powerful groups: the social classes.’<sup>521</sup>

This type of social domination thus imposes itself on both sides of the class relation. Capitalists are deprived of everything except money, while the ‘non-capitalist experiences a more brutal form of privation.’ This social situation is also indicative of the subjective aspect of alienation, human estrangement - where ‘the essence of man has been handed over to a thing, to money, to the fetish’<sup>522</sup> - and is reflected in everyone being alienated from human community because they are compelled to act as atomised individuals and to treat each other as means or instruments of self-perpetuation.

Fetishism is therefore interpreted by Lefebvre as a socially constituted concrete abstraction that functions as an alienated, quantified, autonomous and inverted form of social domination mediating and compelling individuals’ action.

However, Lefebvre also posits limits to the extent of domination, and through doing so he distinguishes himself from Lukács and critical theory. This is indicated in Lefebvre’s description of social inversion as ‘intervening’ by ‘trying to determine’ individuals, which I will now bring out by highlighting how Lefebvre contrasts himself with Lukács and the critical theory, and what I will term the dualistic opposition that Lefebvre views as indicative of sociality.

Lefebvre was quite critical about the systemisation and pervasiveness of Lukács’ theory of reification. This can be seen on a theoretical level where Lefebvre argues that the ‘very important observations by Marx are not to be systematized as a single

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<sup>519</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 83/84)

<sup>520</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 43)

<sup>521</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 44)

<sup>522</sup>(Lefebvre 2009, 45)

theory of reification, which according to some constitutes the essence of *Capital* and of Marxism generally.<sup>523</sup> Consequently, Lefebvre asserts that 'the thesis of reification misinterprets the essential meaning of the socio-economic theory expounded in *Capital*.'<sup>524</sup> This is due to the fact that Lefebvre held that Lukács' systematic theory of reification was too determinate. For although Lukács, in Lefebvre's analysis, was cognisant of the autonomous properties of fetishism,<sup>525</sup> he did not realise that this process of inversion and determination has a limit:

The logic of commodities, however, for all its encroachments upon praxis and its complex interactions with other forms of society and consciousness does not succeed in forming a permanent, closed system. With its complex determinations human labour is not entirely taken over by this form, does not become an inherent element of its content.<sup>526</sup>

These different theoretical interpretations of Marx have repercussions as regards the way in which Lefebvre contrasts Lukács' Marxian theory of social domination with his own. On the one hand, Lefebvre charges that 'the school of Lukács has overestimated the theory of reification to the point of making it the foundation of a philosophy and sociology (the two are regarded as identical in this systematization).'<sup>527</sup> Lukács' social theory is thus a purely speculative construction on the part of a philosopher 'unacquainted with the working class', entailing that 'the proletariat's class consciousness replaces classical philosophy.'<sup>528</sup> This is likewise the case for the critical theory, which, like Lukács' theory, is held by Lefebvre to work only at the level of words and ideas, and on the basis of a systemised conception of the

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<sup>523</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 47)

<sup>524</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 47)

<sup>525</sup> 'The fetishes that take on a life of their own, become autonomous, and impose their laws on interhuman relationships, can function only as *abstract* things by reducing human beings to the status of abstract things, by relegating them to the world of forms, reducing them to these forms to their structures and functions. There is logic immanent in commodities *qua* forms, a logic which tends to constitute a world of its own, the world of commodities (Lefebvre 1969, 48)

<sup>526</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 48)

<sup>527</sup>(Lefebvre 1969, 48)

<sup>528</sup>These criticisms can also be seen in Lefebvre's criticism of what he referred to as the 'watered down Marxism of critical theory.' As part of the school of Lukács it is likewise totalising and sociologically deficient and rests on the 'long-obsolent notion of ideology.' (Henri Lefebvre 1992)

moribund category of ideology.<sup>529</sup> On the other hand, in opposition to Lukács and the critical theory, Lefebvre's theory of social domination accounts for the problems Lefebvre identifies in Lukács and in the critical theory by conceiving of an internal opposition between these abstract and autonomous fetishistic social forms and the content they cannot entirely determine.

It is this internal opposition that forms the basis for what I will term Lefebvre's dualistic opposition between quantity and quality, in which quantified, fetishistic abstractions cannot entirely grasp or determine their qualitative content. Lefebvre is always adamant that qualitative content cannot be subsumed by quantitative forms: 'it must not be forgotten that, underneath the formal appearances, the contents persists.'<sup>530</sup> Therefore in contrast to Lukács, Lefebvre's idea of internal opposition stresses that the 'the abstract thing, the form (commodity, money, capital) cannot carry the process of reification ('thingification') to its conclusion.'<sup>531</sup> This is because '[i]t cannot free itself from the human relationships it tends to delineate, to distort, and to change into relations between things. It cannot fully exist *qua* thing.'<sup>532</sup> As a result, this process '[d]oes not impose an entirely closed system. Human labour is not entirely taken over by form.'<sup>533</sup> Instead 'the world of commodities makes its way into praxis, penetrating it if not taking it over entirely.' Therefore, '[h]uman beings do not become things'. For Lefebvre 'this takes place only under slavery'. Rather 'what is more likely is that human beings would be turned into animated abstractions, living, breathing, suffering fictions, did they not put up dramatic resistance to this process.'<sup>534</sup>

Lefebvre's Marxism thus consists in a non-systematic Hegelian interpretation of Marx, in which Marx reformulates important aspects of Hegel's idealism in his dialectical materialist account of social praxis and alienation. Such an interpretation is reflected in Lefebvre's conception of fetishism as a concrete abstraction, which he argues Marx used to articulate the social constitution of the concrete abstractions of commodities, money and capital. At the same time, Lefebvre's interpretation of fetishism is also constitutive of how he construes social domination. In his view, the

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<sup>529</sup> 'The fact is that the long-obsolescent notion of ideology is now truly on its last legs, even if critical theory still holds it to be necessary.' (Lefebvre 1992, 44)

<sup>530</sup> (Lefebvre 1969, 49)

<sup>531</sup> (Lefebvre 1969, 47)

<sup>532</sup> (Lefebvre 1969, 47)

<sup>533</sup> (Lefebvre 1969, 47)

<sup>534</sup> (Lefebvre 1969, 100)

characteristics of the autonomous, inverted, alienated and alienating social domination of capitalism intervenes in social life mediating and compelling individual action. However, Lefebvre also posits that qualitative content always internally opposes these quantitative forms, and that it resists becoming entirely determined by them preventing the transformation of humans into things. This interpretation of Marx serves as 'the starting point' that Lefebvre 'refines' and 'complements' in his attempts to conceive of how domination is socially embedded<sup>535</sup> and resisted in the socially complex categories of everyday life, urban forms and social spaces. In what follows I focus on how Lefebvre's interpretation of the constituting and constitutive aspects of the concrete abstraction of fetishism are drawn on and articulated in three such attempts.

Before doing so, however, it will be important to consider the context in which these attempts were formulated.

As Stefan Kipfer has argued, Lefebvre's politics shifted in response to his historical context.<sup>536</sup> The same can be said of Lefebvre's attempts to supplement his interpretation of Marx by conceiving how domination is embedded in social life.

Lefebvre first came into contact with Marx and Hegel through the surrealists in the 1930's. In that decade, Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman also published the first French translation of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and the first French work of Hegelian Marxism: *La Conscience Mystifiée*, which fused Marx's idea of mystification with Hegel's unhappy consciousness. During this time Lefebvre also wrote the unpublished fragment: *Notes on Everyday Life*.

Following a period in which Lefebvre served as the leading intellectual and polemicist of the French communist party (PCF), his ties to the party were severed. This freed Lefebvre, allowing him to re-engage with his earlier Hegelian interpretation of Marx. It also led him to stress a non-dogmatic and non-systematic Hegelian Marxism

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<sup>535</sup> As I explained in the introduction by using the terms 'socially embedded' and 'embodied' I refer to theories that attempt to articulate how Marx's account in *Capital* is instantiated in the complex and messy social reality.

<sup>536</sup> Kipfer characterises these contexts as (1) the critique of Stalinism in France and Eastern Europe before and after his expulsion from the PCF [French Communist Party] at the end of the 1950s; (2) a critical engagement with Situationist avant-gardism in the 1950s and 1960s; (3) a brief flirtation with the alternative Communism of Yugoslavia and China; and (4) his contribution to New Left politics in France both before and after 1968. In (Kipfer 2008, 232)

that focused on areas of social life that were anathema to party doctrine. Lefebvre's project of the critique of everyday life and his utilisation of the theory of alienation are the prime examples of Lefebvre's writings during this period.

Lefebvre's reformulation of the critique of everyday life occurred in the context of his engagement with the Situationists and the New Left in the 1960s. Lefebvre's writings in this context incorporated the theoretical and political concerns of the 1960s, such as consumer societies, the bureaucratic state and the emergence of new social movements. This is reflected in his reformulation of social domination and the fragmentation and jettisoning of the explanatory power of the theory of alienation.

These influences are also evident in Lefebvre's writings on *Cities and Space*, which led Lefebvre to once again reformulate his theory of how capitalism is instantiated in social life and his concurrent conception of domination.

It is to the first of these attempts that I now turn.

### **3. The Critique of Everyday Life**

The critique of everyday life is perhaps Lefebvre's most widely known theoretical endeavour and consists of three volumes that were published over the course of 50 years. Since these volumes do not encapsulate one sustained critique but consist in several phases in which Lefebvre offers different formulations of the critique of everyday life, I separate them into what I term the early classic Marxist humanist phase of the critique, and his later revision of the critique in the 1960s.<sup>537</sup>

#### **3.1 Notes for a Critique of Everyday Life**

Two passages in *Mystification: Notes for a Critique of Everyday Life* show the way fetishism is utilised as a basis to articulate the initial formulation of the category of everyday life. In this phase, Lefebvre conceives domination in terms of the objective and subjective properties of alienation. Fetishism is used to demonstrate the social genesis of alienation. Its properties are also used as a basis for how Lefebvre extends

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<sup>537</sup> I refrain from focusing on Lefebvre's return to the theme of everyday life in the 80s for two reasons: (1) Lefebvre devotes more time to the critique of everyday life in the 40s and 60s (2) because his reformulation of the critique of everyday life in the 1980s focuses on Lefebvre's idea of 'rhythmanalysis' rather than alienation, fetishism and social domination.

his interpretation of Marx's theory of alienation by conceiving of other types of alienation. The former can be seen in Lefebvre's remark that '[t]he theory of *fetishism* contained in Marx's work explains how the phenomena of alienation and mystification are possible'<sup>538</sup> due to the specific way that capitalist production creates the alienated abstract and autonomous fetishistic form of commodities:

Capitalism is a system for producing merchandise. When it turns into merchandise, the object becomes detached from itself, so to speak, it enters a system of relationships that are expressed through it, so that in the end it seems to be the subject of these relationships, their causal agent. Relationships between men are masked by relationships between objects, human social existence is realized only by the abstract existence of their products. Objects seem to take on a life of their own.<sup>539</sup>

These forms of merchandise grant the world, social relationships collectively create, an 'alien power'<sup>540</sup> that dominates human beings rendering them in a state of alienation:

The market dominates human beings; they become the plaything of anything with which they are unfamiliar, and which sweeps them along. The market is already a machine and an inexorable destiny. People are now alienated, divided from themselves. Divisions of labour, labour itself, individual roles and functions, the distribution of work, culture and traditions, all impose themselves as constraints. Each person experiences the collective achievements of society as the work of an alien power.<sup>541</sup>

Consequently, 'this insane, indissoluble will of the fetish by which we are compelled to live'<sup>542</sup> is used by Lefebvre to provide the basis for what he envisions as a study of the ways in which these dominating properties of alienation are instantiated in the everyday life of capitalist society. Such a study is based on Lefebvre's interpretation of the Hegelian category of 'mystified consciousness' and the Marxian one of alienation. It will focus on the way that human social praxis constitutes alienated, fetishistic forms that invert, dominate and alienate humanity in social life: 'Alienation, that real abstraction, that false life that exists only through him and feeds on man - the 'human' that has lost its way on the road towards his realization - inevitably is dispersal, and a mutual exteriority of the elements of culture.'<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>538</sup>(Lefebvre 2006, 82)

<sup>539</sup>(Lefebvre 2006, 82)

<sup>540</sup>(Lefebvre 2006, 82)

<sup>541</sup>(Lefebvre 2006, 82)

<sup>542</sup>(Lefebvre 2006, 83)

<sup>543</sup>(Lefebvre 2006, 75)

### 3.2 The Critique of Everyday Life

This relationship between fetishism, alienation and everyday life is drawn out in Lefebvre's first extended attempt to theorise how domination is embodied in the lived social and cultural forms of capitalist society in the first volume of *The Critique of Everyday Life*.<sup>544</sup>

This work also contains Lefebvre's first formulation of the category of 'everyday life', which is designed to supplement Marx's analysis by capturing how capitalism is instantiated and resisted in social life. Everyday life is thus defined as a 'residual category'<sup>545</sup> embedded and dialectically related to the 'socio-economic formation.'<sup>546</sup> Such a residual category is 'profoundly related to *all* activities, and encompasses them *with all their differences* and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground.'<sup>547</sup> Accordingly, everyday life is where 'the sum total of relations which make the human – and every human being – a whole takes its shape and its form. In it is expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into play the totality of the real.'<sup>548</sup>

Lefebvre's account of the composition and characteristics of domination are substantiated through his interpretation of fetishism. As he outlined in *Notes for a Critique of Everyday life*, this interpretation accounts for the constitution of social domination in everyday life, whilst its properties provide a model through which to theorise other forms of social alienation.

These kinds of alienation are premised on Lefebvre's account of the relationship between fetishism and alienation and its role in social constitution. In the case of the former, fetishism is what links the young and old Marx:<sup>549</sup> 'The theory of alienation becomes transformed into the theory of fetishism (fetishism of commodities, money, capital).'<sup>550</sup> For the latter, fetishism, according to Lefebvre, discloses how social

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<sup>544</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a,97)

<sup>545</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 97)

<sup>546</sup> Lefebvre's critical Marxism thus bypasses the schematism of the base-superstructure.

<sup>547</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 57)

<sup>548</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 91-92)

<sup>549</sup> '[W]here economy and philosophy meet lies the theory of fetishism.' (Lefebvre 2008a, 178)

<sup>550</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 80)

relations create alienated fetish-forms that invert to dominate both sides of the class relation:

Money, currency, commodities, capital are nothing more than relations between human beings (between 'individual,' qualitative human tasks). And yet these relations take on the appearance and the form of *things* external to human beings. The appearance becomes reality; because men believe that these 'fetishes' exist outside of themselves they really do function like objective things. Human activities are swept along and torn from their own reality and consciousness, and become subservient to these things. Humanly speaking, someone who thinks only of getting rich is living his life subjected to a thing, namely, money. But more than this, the proletarian, whose life is used as a means for the accumulation of capital, is thrown to the mercy of an external power.<sup>551</sup>

The theory of fetishism therefore establishes how alienation is constituted in everyday life by accounting for the social processes that create it.

Furthermore, since everybody 'moves within fetishism as a mode of existence and of consciousness', the 'theory of fetishism' also 'demonstrates the *economic, everyday* basis of the *philosophical* theories of mystification and alienation.'<sup>552</sup>

Lefebvre's conception of social domination in *Critique of Everyday Life* is thus centred on the relationship between fetishism and his classical Hegelian-Marxist humanist conception of alienation, in which alienation consists in the notion that capitalist social praxis produces alien and abstract forms that try to dominate society. In doing so, they alienate humanity from its own essence.

Lefebvre proposes to study this mode of existence by outlining several types of social alienation that draw on and supplement Marx's theory. Fetishism is conceived as one of these types of alienation – economic alienation – and is placed alongside other types of social alienation.<sup>553</sup> These other types – individuality and private consciousness, mystifications and mystified consciousness, money-fetishism and economic alienation, the critique of needs, psychological and moral alienation, the alienation of the worker and man – mirror the properties of fetishism and attest to the myriad ways in which the society that humans collectively produce dominates and alienates them. As a whole these types of domination disclose that '*alienation is constant and everyday*', and articulate the 'way a dehumanized, brutally objective power

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<sup>551</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 179)

<sup>552</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 179)

<sup>553</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 179)



holds sway over all social life; according to its differing aspects, we have named it: money, fragmented division of labour, market, capital, mystification and deprivation etc.<sup>554</sup> These forms of alienation are also granted subjective counterparts. Brought together, they culminate in a proto-existential situation of alienated domination that suffuses everyday life where 'man is torn from his self, from his own nature, from his consciousness dragged down and dehumanized by his own social products,'<sup>555</sup> so that 'alienation appears in day-to-day life, the life of the proletarian and even of the petty bourgeois and the capitalist (the difference being the capitalists collaborate with alienation's dehumanizing power.'<sup>556</sup>

However, everyday life is also the point where Lefebvre's dualistic opposition resides. In his early work, this dualistic opposition is understood to occur between the alienating forms that seek to dominate everyday life, which are paired with the quantifying and abstract aspects of the commodity, and the qualitatively humane ways in which this unsuccessful attempt at total domination is resisted.

Opposed to these forms of alienation stands the qualitative side of Lefebvre's dualistic opposition between quantity and quality. Lefebvre identifies a myriad of qualitative moments that are present in capitalist society that resist determination.<sup>557</sup> These oppositions are premised on the wide-ranging capacities of the 'total man', leading Lefebvre to designate different phenomena such as political and social institutions, human needs and creativity as qualitative forms of opposition. Some of these are stated in a dualistic manner by Lefebvre 'as an opposition and "contrast" between a certain number of terms: everyday life and festival—mass moments and exceptional moments – triviality and splendour – seriousness and play, reality and dreams, etc.'<sup>558</sup> As a whole, the social state of alienation is construed as part of the necessary process of historical 'becoming', in which the criticism of alienation will lead to its overcoming and the development of the total man, in which alienation will be overcome and humanity will be at one with its essence.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>554</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 166)

<sup>555</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 166)

<sup>556</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 167)

<sup>557</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 173)

<sup>558</sup>(Lefebvre 2008a, 251)

<sup>559</sup> 'The drama of alienation is dialectical. Through the manifold forms of his labour, man has made himself real by realizing a human world. He is inseparable from this 'other self', his creation, his mirror, his statue - more; his body. The totality of object and human products taken together form an integral part of human reality. On this

In sum, Lefebvre's first formulation of the critique of everyday life is centred on an account of how capitalist social praxis constitutes alien and abstract fetishistic social forms that dominate sociality and alienate humanity from its own essence within everyday life. At the same time, these abstract forms are not entirely determinant and are opposed by the qualitative contents of human society. This classic Marxist-humanist formulation thus extends Lefebvre's interpretation of Marx to the realm of social life through the residual category of the everyday and his utilisation of fetishism. However, this classical humanist model is modified in Lefebvre's second formulation of the critique of everyday life.

#### **4 The Critique of Everyday Life in the 1960s**

Lefebvre re-envisioned his project of the critique of everyday life 15 years after the first volume was published. *Critique of Everyday Life Volume II* and *Everyday life in the Modern World* are indicative of a contextual and theoretical shift in Lefebvre's project. They also reflect the development of French consumer society and Lefebvre's dialogue with the Situationists and with other members of the French avant-garde. Both of these contextual influences are captured in Lefebvre's adoption of Guy Debord's contention that everyday life has been 'literally colonized'<sup>560</sup> by commodification.

Volume Two of the *Critique* thus represent the second phase of Lefebvre's attempt to reformulate and supplement Marx's categories and analysis by providing methodological foundations for Lefebvre's reformulation of the critique of everyday life. *Everyday Life in the Modern World* provides an analysis of capitalist social domination that reflects this reformulation. Taken together, these volumes provide a more complex and fragmented account of social domination in everyday life. However, such a theory still relies on Lefebvre's interpretation of fetishism accounting for the constitution and the constituent properties of concrete abstractions as what he terms terrorist forms of domination.

##### **4.1 Critique of Everyday Life Volume II**

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level, objects are not simply means or implements; by producing them, men are working to create the human.' (Lefebvre 2008a, 169)

<sup>560</sup>(Lefebvre 2008b, 11)

*Critique of Everyday Life Volume two* reformulates Lefebvre's project by outlining the 'foundations for a sociology of everyday life'. These foundations are intended to join the Hegelian-Marxian themes of Lefebvre's project with social complexity, as based on Lefebvre's new understanding of his Hegelian-Marxism as a meta-philosophy. This reflects the sense in which Lefebvre was using the central concepts drawn from his Hegelian-Marxism to investigate social phenomena. Lefebvre's reformulation of the critique of everyday life thus modifies the classic Marxist humanism of Volume One by: (1) amending the Hegelian-Marxist categories central to the first critique of everyday life and integrating them with theories taken from contemporary theoretical developments, such as linguistics and structuralism to provide a more extensive object of study;<sup>561</sup> (2) jettisoning the category of 'total man' as the basis of his conception of subjective domination; and (3) redefining everyday life as a level of social reality.

Lefebvre's revision of the categories of praxis and alienation are integral aspects of this reformulation of the critique of everyday life. In both cases, Lefebvre charges his original formulation of these categories as being too simplistic. He argues that they can be rendered more complex by developing a typology of these categories.

Praxis thus 'reveals an extreme complexity on very varied levels.'<sup>562</sup> These levels form a totality that encompasses 'both material production and spiritual production' inclusive of the Marxian categories of the base and superstructure. All of these levels structure, mediate or intervene in everyday life, which is the level where a 'range of effective representations, symbols, regulations, controls, models and norms which intervene to regulate it.'<sup>563</sup> The typology of praxis that Lefebvre proposes thus constitutes this array of phenomena that intervene in everyday life. This intervention is constitutive of what he terms utilitarian and fetishistic consciousness, where these 'received representations [...] are not recognized as the results of history and functions of an entire society.'<sup>564</sup>

This level is also constitutive of 'fetishistic practice' and 'repetitive praxis' which are formulated in Lefebvre's revision of alienation. In this reformulation Lefebvre

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<sup>561</sup> A summary of the complex foundations Lefebvre elaborates to critique this level are beyond the confines of this thesis. Furthermore many of them are not even taken up by Lefebvre in *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. For these reasons I focus on how Lefebvre amends his Hegelian-Marxism in these volumes of the critique of everyday life.<sup>561</sup>

<sup>562</sup>(Lefebvre 2008b, 237)

<sup>563</sup>(Lefebvre 2008b, 236)

<sup>564</sup>(Lefebvre 2008b, 243)

argues that Marx's theory of alienation focused on one specific type of alienation – fetishism – to the detriment of other types.<sup>565</sup> Lefebvre proposes to supplement this objective sense of alienation (as a mode of socially constituted alienated and inverted social domination) by moving to elaborate a typology. The typology that Lefebvre proposes also addresses his criticism of Lukács' sociological deficit. In contrast to reification, which Lefebvre argues 'disguises the many forms alienation adopts',<sup>566</sup> Lefebvre argues that alienation is 'infinitely complex.'<sup>567</sup> He proposes that other forms of alienation which range from the state to the alienation of women, children, social groups, the ruling class and technology should be taken into account without subsuming them and treating them as one type.<sup>568</sup> This typology of alienation thus distinguishes between everyday alienation, reification, political alienation and others.<sup>569</sup>

As part of this revision of alienation, Lefebvre also builds on his conviction that alienation can never be totalised. He outlines a dialectic of alienation – dis-alienation – new alienation, which, he contends, exemplifies everyday life in capitalist society. In this way alienation is never conceived as total, and it never determines or entirely captures human social activity.

This reformulation of alienation is embodied in Lefebvre's new conception of everyday life. On this level, Lefebvre's dualistic opposition is no longer considered in terms of alienated and non-alienated essence. It is now construed in the opposition between the category of the everyday (which consists in abstract quantifying forms of domination) and everydayness (which entails qualitative needs, desires and possibility). This opposition is extended to a number of new everyday phenomena that Lefebvre introduces into his account. These phenomena are instances of the way in which society mediates individuals, thereby enclosing them in abstract everydayness through which individuals resist in a qualitative manner. These phenomena reflect the influence of other thinkers on Lefebvre, as they include the Nietzschean oppositions between

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<sup>565</sup> 'Marx tended to push the many forms of alienation to one side so as to give one specific definition in terms of the extreme case he chose to study: the transformation of man's activities and relations into *things* by the action of *economic* fetishes [...] reduced to economic alienation within and by capitalism, alienation would disappear completely and in one blow.' (Lefebvre 2008b, 207)

<sup>566</sup> (Lefebvre 2008b, 208)

<sup>567</sup> (Lefebvre 2008b, 208)

<sup>568</sup> (Lefebvre 2008b, 209)

<sup>569</sup> Lefebvre also proposes defining these types in terms of the distinctions Marx makes between *Entfremdung*, *Entäusserung*, *Verdinglichung* etc.

repetition and creativity, and types of quantitative and cyclical time.<sup>570</sup>

These amendments are characterised in a Hegelian-Marxist vein by designating everyday life as the content of this variety of abstract forms. This opposition between form and content is also representative of the dialectic of alienation-dis-alienation. It is also reflective of the dual opposition between everyday and everydayness in which fetishistic concrete abstractions are constitutive of everyday life but they cannot fully determine the content of social activity:

In the everyday, alienations, fetishisms and reifications (deriving from money and commodities) all have their various effects. At the same time, when (up to a certain point) everyday needs become desires, they come across goods and appropriate them. Therefore critical study of everyday life will reveal the following conflict: maximum alienation and relative disalienation [...] The theory of alienation and reification must take this dialectic into account if it is not to lapse into that speculative form of reification known as dogmatism. *There is a 'world' of objects, but it is also a human world, and an area of desires and goods, an area of possibilities, and not simply a 'world' of inert things.*<sup>571</sup>

*Critique of Everyday Life Volume II* thus lays out Lefebvre's revision of the critique of everyday life by transforming the categories of praxis and alienation into a series of types aimed at capturing the complexity of everyday life. However, it never goes past the point of proposing ways of studying these phenomena, or of applying them to an analysis of social domination. However, these revisions to Lefebvre's conception of everyday life and the fragmented status of alienation are reflected in *Everyday Life in the Modern World*.

## 4.2 Everyday Life in the Modern World

This is because the Hegelian-Marxian elements of Lefebvre's reformulation of the *Critique of Everyday Life* are drawn out in comments on contemporary capitalism. His definition of the latter – 'forced bureaucratic consumption' – reflects the concerns with consumer society and bureaucracy outlined in volume II. These elements of Lefebvre's analysis of society are enumerated in terms of the historically unprecedented quantitative economic expansion that has produced 'little change' in the class relation. Rather, for Lefebvre, such an expansion has led to the administration

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<sup>570</sup> For example see (Lefebvre 2008b, 47-51)

<sup>571</sup> (Lefebvre 2008b, 66-67)

and institutionalisation of social life and the attempted systemisation and control of everyday life.

Lefebvre provides an analysis of this phase of capitalism by conceiving of different social phenomena he sees as indicative of what he terms 'terroristic forms of domination.' These forms are indicative of 'terrorist society' and exemplify 'forced bureaucratic consumption.' As a whole, 'terrorist society' consists of: (a) social production that is oriented for the ends of one class, impoverishing the other class; (b) widespread biological, physiological, natural educational and developmental repression; (c) the phenomena described by Lefebvre's fragmented and revised typology of alienation; (d) the reproduction of (a)(b) and (c) through ideology and compulsion in everyday life. These factors lead to the diffuse nature of 'terrorist society' in which 'pressure is exerted from all sides on its members' and 'comes from everywhere and from every specific thing; the system' and is 'submit[ting] every member to the whole.'<sup>572</sup>

Lefebvre's study of terrorist forms aims to understand 'the conditions from which terrorism arises.'<sup>573</sup> Once again, these terrorist forms reflect Lefebvre's conception of fetishism as a concrete abstraction. They are conceived as constituted by the logic of the concrete abstraction of the commodity world,<sup>574</sup> whilst their properties are established through analogy with the properties of the concrete abstraction of the fetishism of the commodity form.<sup>575</sup> He proposes to conduct this

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<sup>572</sup>(Lefebvre 1984, 47)

<sup>573</sup>(Lefebvre 1984, 150)

<sup>574</sup> 'The following theory taken from Marx's *Das Kapital* seems apt and conclusive: trade is a form, distinct from its contents (social labour), and its contingent retinue (negotiations, palavers, words and sentences, gestures and rituals). This dialectical theory *reduces* the act of trading to its simple form [...] such a form, furthermore, is only isolated from its content and contingencies at a first operation [...] this allows the linking of form to a gradual emergence and creation of its own social experience so that it becomes, in fact, the experience [...] trade as a form contains a *logic*; as the product of labour it produces sequences, intelligibly linked actions; it is both a social and an intellectual phenomenon.' (Lefebvre 1984, 104-105)

<sup>575</sup> 'Our inquiry into the manner in which forms exist has led to an investigation of social reality. Ought we to reconsider and modify our concept of 'reality'? The existence and the effects of forms are unlike those of sensorial objects, technical objects, metaphysical substances or 'pure' abstractions; though they are abstract they are none the less intellectual and social objects, they require sensorial, material and practical foundations but cannot be identified with such vehicles. Thus trade value requires an object (a product) and a comparison between objects in order to appear and express its content which is productive collective labour and a comparison

study by transforming the residual category of everyday life into 'space.' For Lefebvre, everyday life is now the space where these terrorist forms of capitalism are embedded in what he terms the 'lived.'

These forms and the space that they 'infiltrate' are thus representative of Lefebvre's dualistic opposition between the everyday and everydayness, quantity and quality. One example of this can be seen in the following opposition between two 'distinct' types of leisure: the quantitative type, in which 'leisure' is 'integrated with everyday life (the perusal of daily papers, television etc.) and is conducive to profound discontent, and the qualitative side; 'the prospect of departure, the demand for evasion, the will to escape through worldliness, holidays, LSD, debauchery of madness.'<sup>576</sup>

On the quantitative side stands Lefebvre's revised diagnosis of alienated sociality, which is exemplary of the typology proposed in volume two.<sup>577</sup> In this society of forced bureaucratic consumption, alienation has become a '*social practice*'.<sup>578</sup> Everyday life is now the site where this social practice tries to integrate people into the '[a]bstract, quantitative 'pure formal space' that defines the world of terror[istic]<sup>579</sup> forms which is not the space of false consciousness but of true consciousness or of the conscience of reality, isolated from possibility.'<sup>580</sup> Such terrorist forms are inclusive of commodified, pervasive and administered society. They also reflect Lefebvre's adaptation of

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between labours. However, object and content without form have neither a specifically intellectual nor a specifically social reality. To a certain extent form defines a thing's significance; yet it possesses something both more and less, some thing different from what is signified; it constitutes an object's significance but also appropriates it, allows itself to be signified and absorbs the signifier [...] They are real but not in the terms of other types of reality; they are projected on the screen of everyday life without which they would have nothing to explore, define and organize.' (Lefebvre 1984, 186)

<sup>576</sup>(Lefebvre 1984, 85)

<sup>577</sup> 'The theory of alienation is reputed to be out of date; indeed, certain forms of alienation may perhaps have vanished [...] New types of alienation have joined ranks with the old, enriching the typology of alienation; political, ideological, technological, bureaucratic, urban etc. We would suggest that alienation is spreading and becoming so powerful that it obliterates all trace or consciousness of alienation [...] what is new is that the theory of alienation [...] has become a *social practice*, a class strategy whereby philosophy and history are set aside so as to confuse the issue and successfully inhibit any consciousness of the actual state of total alienation.' (Lefebvre 1984, 94)

<sup>578</sup>(Lefebvre 1984, 94)

<sup>579</sup>(Lefebvre 1984, 77)

<sup>580</sup>(Lefebvre 1984, 89)

structuralist methodology and include exchange, maths, writing, linguistics, contracts and practical-sensorial objects. Yet these terrorist forms cannot reduce the 'irreducible' qualitative aspects of the lived.<sup>581</sup> For while these forms aspire to a concrete existence they are ultimately reliant on human social actions that they cannot entirely determine. Since the interrelation between these forms is not total,<sup>582</sup> these forms cannot determine content. Ultimately, these forms 'simultaneously organize' everyday life and 'are projected upon it, but their concerted efforts cannot reduce it; residual and irreducible, it eludes all attempts at institutionalization, it evades the grip of forms.'

Lefebvre's re-envisioning of the critique of everyday life in the 1960s as another attempt to supplement and revise Marx's analysis thus moves away from his classic Marxist humanism. The theory of alienation is fragmented on an objective level and supplanted on a subjective level by the jettisoning of the 'total man'. Yet at the same time, there are continuities in Lefebvre's attempt to conceive of (1) the constitution and constituent properties of a complex socially embedded theory of domination in analogy with the properties of the concrete abstraction of commodity fetishism and (2) an internal opposition between form and content and quantity and quality in everyday life demonstrating that the concrete abstractions are not entirely determinate. As I will now show, Lefebvre's work on cities and space represents Lefebvre's attempt to transpose these elements to the categories of the urban form and of abstract space in order to articulate a more concrete theory of how domination is socially instantiated in conjunction with concrete abstraction. These theories situate the everyday in a more sophisticated analysis of social life. At the same time, they further supplement Marx's analysis, by providing a theory of the social spaces that concrete abstractions pervade and interrelate with.

## **5. Fetishism and Social Domination in Cities and Space.**

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<sup>581</sup>(Lefebvre 1984, 189)

<sup>582</sup>(Lefebvre 1984, 188) See also: 'There is no single absolute chosen system but only sub-systems separated by cracks, gaps and lacunae; forms do not converge, they have no grip on the content and cannot reduce it permanently; the irreducible crops up after each reduction [...] only a relative, temporary reduction can be achieved [...] urban life is the setting for this.' (Lefebvre 1984, 190)



## 5.1 The Urban Form

Lefebvre's writings on urbanisation and cities were undertaken shortly after the publication of *Critique of Everyday Life Volume II* and *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. In these works Lefebvre examines the historic and social process of what he refers to as the 'urban revolution.' In order to do so, Lefebvre employs many of the same aspects of his metaphilosophical Hegelian-Marxism that he brought to the *Critique of Everyday Life*. In particular, he conceptualises this historical and social process by adapting his interpretation of Marx's theory of fetishism – an interpretation that treats the latter as a socially constituted, concrete abstraction that constitutes society – and uses this in order to characterise the urbanisation of cities. This urbanisation is then opposed to a qualitative idea of urban dwelling.

This can be seen in Lefebvre's designation of what he terms the 'urban form' as a concrete abstraction. For Lefebvre, the 'urban form' is the result of the 'urban revolution' of social space that has occurred in the contemporary phase of capitalism. This process has modified the relationship between town and country as well as the structure of cities and has remodelled all of them in the image of 'industrial urbanisation.' This process of industrial urbanisation corresponds to the Keynesian state-capitalist mode of production imposed upon urban spaces. Urbanisation homogenises urban regions, rendering previously distinct and localised areas into one undifferentiated abstract mass of space. This space swallows up and obliterates city neighbourhoods and the historical difference between the town and country.<sup>583</sup>

Urbanisation is implemented by what Lefebvre refers to as 'Urbanism'. He defines this as 'the form of organisational capital [...] in other words, *a bureaucratic society of controlled consumption*' that supplements 'the logic of commodities' because it

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<sup>583</sup> Lefebvre periodises this historical development as follows: 'First period. Industry and the process of industrialization assault and ravage pre-existing urban reality, destroying it through practice and ideology, to the point of extirpating it from reality and consciousness. Led by a class strategy, industrialisation acts as a negative force over urban reality: the urban social is denied by the industrial economic. Second period (in part juxtaposed to the first). Urbanization spreads and urban society becomes general. Urban reality, in and by its own destruction makes itself acknowledged as socio-economic reality. One discovers that the whole society is liable to fall apart if it lacks the city and centrality: an essential means for the planned organization of production and consumption has disappeared.' (Lefebvre 2003, 81)

‘controls consumption of space and habitat’<sup>584</sup> The urban form is therefore a concrete abstraction because it is constituted in tandem with the neo-capitalist state, and mirrors its characteristics. It resides in the place where production becomes socialised, and where social relationships occur.<sup>585</sup> Consequently, urbanisation is a concrete abstraction constituted by social praxis, which possesses abstract, quantitative properties that intervene in social life:

The urban is, therefore, pure form: a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity. This form has no specific content but is a centre of attraction and life. It is an abstraction, but unlike a metaphysical entity, the urban is a concrete abstraction, associated with practice. Living creatures, the products of industry, technology of wealth, works of culture, ways of living, situations, the modulations and ruptures of the everyday- the urban accumulates all content.<sup>586</sup>

This abstract urban form is embedded in several levels of social space. This theorisation of social space articulates Lefebvre’s attempt to situate everyday life alongside the function and pervasiveness of the ‘logical’ function of other concrete abstractions, such as the world of commodities, the state and the urban space that they inhabit.

The first level of the urban form is thus the level of the concrete abstractions of exchange, networks and urban phenomena. This is the level shaped by the logic of these abstractions, which as abstract alien forms try to dominate urban life. This level is thus the level of the form of organised capital, consisting in the ‘totalizing repressive space of the logic of commodities present in every object that is bought, sold and consumed’ as well as the logic of urbanism and of the state-planned bureaucratic society of controlled consumption.

The second level consists in the social terrain that these abstractions inhabit. Like the category of everyday life, what Lefebvre terms the ‘urban fabric’ can be said to consist in how these abstractions are embedded in the constitutive structure and

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<sup>584</sup>(Lefebvre 2003, 164)

<sup>585</sup> ‘Space is no longer only an indifferent medium, the sum of places where surplus value is created, realized, and distributed. It becomes the product of social labour, the very general object of production, and consequently of the formation of surplus value. This is how production becomes social within the very framework of neo-capitalism’ (Lefebvre 2003, 155) ‘However, the urban is not indifferent to all differences, precisely because it unites them. In this sense, the city constructs, identifies and delivers the essence of social relationships.’ (Lefebvre 2003, 118)

<sup>586</sup>(Lefebvre 2003, 119)

terrain of the city. The urban fabric is thus where the logic of level one is socially embodied in the fragmented, homogenous, alienated and opaque industrial urban form of the city. But it is also where these 'logics' clash with resistant qualitative elements of the urban fabric, such as grass-roots collective self-management.

In the complementary collection of essays *Writings on Cities*, Lefebvre further develops this notion of studying how social forms are embedded in urban environments. These forms possess a 'double existence as mental and social'<sup>587</sup> and overlap with the 'terrorist forms' described in *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. These forms would presumably be situated at the level of the urban fabric and are coupled with oppositions in the urban environment that the urban form cannot determine – such as the right to the city, that contest the abstract logic of commodities and of bureaucratically controlled consumption.

Level three is where this embodiment is resisted by qualitative human capacities that cannot be entirely determined. Lefebvre holds that there are elements in the urban fabric that cannot be reduced to quantified abstractions, which resist these abstractions. These elements of the 'non-reducible' tie in with the strand of Lefebvre's thought that conceives of creativity and expression as qualitative oppositions to abstraction.

We can then see how Lefebvre's writings on urban form and cities develop and concretise the themes of the critique of everyday life. Rather than treating it as a residual category, Lefebvre embodies the lived experience of everyday life in the social space of the urban form. Like everyday life, the urban form is defined as an historically specific, multi-level phenomenon that is analogous and supplementary to Lefebvre's interpretation of Marx's theory of fetishism. As a consequence, urban space is theorised as a concrete abstraction that functions as an abstract, alien form. This form attempts to dominate the social environment of those who construct it. This attempted dominance cannot achieve complete closure, however, because of the types of resistance inherent within the urban city. The idea of urban space would be drawn on in *The Production of Space*.

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<sup>587</sup> These forms include logic, mathematics, contracts, practico-material objects which are socially embodied quantitative forms equivalent to exchange and the urban form.

## 5.2 Space

This is because *The Production of Space* synthesises Lefebvre's earlier projects: the 'theory of social space encompasses on the one hand the critical analysis of urban reality and on the other that of everyday life.' For both 'everyday life and the urban, indissolubly linked, [are] at one and the same time products and production, [and they] occupy a social space.'<sup>588</sup> Lefebvre's analysis of space is therefore a theory that is focused on accounting for the constitution and constituent properties of social life. This can be seen in his statement that his study is 'concerned with the whole of practico-social activities, as they are entangled in a complex space, urban and everyday, ensuring up to a point the reproduction of relations of production (that is, social relations).'<sup>589</sup> Lefebvre's theory of social space thus represents another attempt to conceive of the constitution of socially embedded domination by locating his earlier projects in the production of social space.<sup>590</sup>

*The Production of Space* also marks the point where Lefebvre formally integrates Nietzsche into his Hegelian Marxian social theory. Lefebvre aligns Nietzsche with the aspects of his own thought that oppose rational calculation and celebrate artistic activity, creativity and desire. This strand of Lefebvre's thought was originally aligned with his theory of the total man, and became more pronounced in Lefebvre's writings in the 60's.<sup>591</sup> Lefebvre conceptually aligns this Nietzschean strand with his Hegelian Marxism by using it to articulate another facet of his dualistic opposition between abstract/concrete, quantity and quality. Nietzsche is incorporated into Lefebvre's theory by formulating what he terms the 'metaphilosophical' 'triadic dialectic'. As in his earlier work, the triadic dialectic reads the Hegelian conception of the concrete universal through Marx's concept of 'social practice.' In *The Production of Space* this Hegelian-Marxism is transformed into a triad by adding Nietzsche's conception of 'art, poetry, and drama.' This Nietzschean aspect of the triadic dialectic is also used by

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<sup>588</sup>(Lefebvre 1996, 185)

<sup>589</sup>(Lefebvre 1996, 185)

<sup>590</sup> As with his other theorisations, Lefebvre views his theory of social space as complementary to Marx's critical method. This can be seen in his statement that a 'comparable approach' to 'Marx's fundamental critique of capitalism' is 'called for today, an approach which would analyse not things in space but space itself, with a view to uncovering the social relationships embedded in it.' (Lefebvre 1996, 89)

<sup>591</sup> This can be seen in the third level of non-reducibility of the abstract urban form and the hedonistic opposition to terrorist forms.

Lefebvre to incorporate the linguistic field and signs as aspects of social praxis that function in space.<sup>592</sup> Lefebvre thus conceives of social space as the place where these three interrelated types of social activity emerge as representational, represented and abstract space. In what follows I focus on the latter.

Lefebvre's concept of abstract space is premised on his Hegelian-Marxian theory of social constitution. This leads Lefebvre to conceive of social space as the location of social and cultural life where social labour and social contradictions 'emerge' and 'regulate life'. This is reflected in Lefebvre's two conceptions of how abstraction emerges in space: (1) the abstraction of humanity from nature, and (2) the social forms that social interaction with nature manifests itself in.<sup>593</sup>

The abstraction of humanity from nature is exemplary of the Nietzschean aspect of Lefebvre's thought, which views rationality as a pernicious type of abstraction that separates humanity from nature. Rationality is abstract, according to Lefebvre, because it functions 'by virtue of the forced introduction of abstraction into nature', resulting in a type of violence that is inherent to rationality.<sup>594</sup> This process of abstraction thus separates and fragments human interaction with nature and emerges in social space.

Lefebvre's other conception of abstraction concerns how this process of human interaction with nature is contained in social space. In capitalism this occurs in abstract space, which is the space where capitalist social forms emerge.<sup>595</sup> Like his previous work, the constitution and constituent properties of abstract space are derived from Lefebvre's interpretation of the concrete abstraction of commodity fetishism. However, in *The Production of Space* the genesis of these properties is theorised as

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<sup>592</sup> The way that this is integrated, in Lefebvre's notion of the linguistic field, lies outside of the concerns of this thesis.

<sup>593</sup> 'As it did not denote a particular 'product'—a thing or an object—but a cluster of relationships, this concept required that the notions of *production* and *product*, and their relationships, be enlarged [...] space can no longer be conceived of as passive or empty, nor as having, like 'products' no other meaning than that of being exchanged and disappearing. As a product, interactively or retroactively, space intervenes in production itself: organization of productive work, transport, flow of raw materials and energy, product distribution networks. In its productive role, and as producer, space (well or badly organized) becomes part of the relations of production and the forces of production. Thus the concept cannot be isolated or remain static. It becomes dialectical: product-producer, underpinning economic and social relations. Does it not also play a part in *reproduction*, reproduction of the productive apparatus, of enlarged reproduction, or relations which it realizes in practice, 'on the ground?'" (Lefebvre 1992, 208)

<sup>594</sup> (Lefebvre 1992, 210)

<sup>595</sup> (Lefebvre 1992, 100)

being interrelated with the world of commodities.

Lefebvre thus characterises the commodity as a 'concrete abstraction' composed by social praxis, which constructs an abstract world that functions in terms of the logic of commodities. The commodity is thus abstract '*on account of* its status as a thing, divorced, during its existence, from its materiality, from the use to which it is put, from productive activity, and from the need that it satisfies.'<sup>596</sup> It is concrete 'just as certainly, by virtue of its practical power', which is 'entirely social.'<sup>597</sup> From this it follows that since the concrete abstraction of the commodity is an object produced by social labour, it must necessarily function in space.<sup>598</sup>

The commodity is a thing: it is in space, and occupies a location so that social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. Their underpinning is spatial.<sup>599</sup>

There is therefore 'a language and a world of the commodity. Hence also a logic and a strategy of the commodity.'<sup>600</sup> However, while 'the genesis and development of this world, this discourse and this logic were portrayed by Marx',<sup>601</sup> capitalism has expanded, and is pervasive. This means that the '[t]he actualization of the worldwide dimension, as a concrete abstraction, is under way'. 'Everything' – the totality – 'is bought and sold.' As a consequence, Marx's analysis of the commodity must be supplemented by an account of the space it inhabits: 'the commodity world brings in its wake certain attitudes towards space, certain actions upon space, even a certain concept of space,'<sup>602</sup> that Lefebvre terms abstract space. Abstract space is thus generated by social labour and possesses the same characteristics as the commodity: it is a concrete abstraction that possesses quantitative, homogenous and equivalent properties. At the same time, abstract space is conceived as the space where these abstract forms emerge and try to regulate life in social space.

This process takes place in what Lefebvre terms contradictory space. Contradictory space is reflective of the dualistic opposition of the commodity form in which the 'paradigmatic (or 'significant') opposition between exchange and use,

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<sup>596</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 340)

<sup>597</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 340)

<sup>598</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 340)

<sup>599</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 341)

<sup>600</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 341)

<sup>601</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 350)

<sup>602</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 342)

between global networks and the determinate locations of production and consumption, is transformed here into a dialectical contradiction, and in the process it becomes spatial.<sup>603</sup> Abstract space is thus opposed by a qualitative and differentiated type of space that exists within and in opposition to abstract space that Lefebvre terms concrete space. Social space is therefore contradictory and marked by a number of dualistic oppositions that play out in a number of areas in Lefebvre's analysis.<sup>604</sup> This is brought out in Lefebvre's analysis of the levels of social space. On these levels abstract space is instantiated in myriad abstract and quantitative phenomena - ranging from forces of production, to consumption, political, ideological and reproductive space - and opposed by the concrete content this abstraction cannot determine.<sup>605</sup>

Abstract space thus structures these levels in the forms of what Lefebvre refers to as the 'great fetishes' of neo-capitalism. Lefebvre utilises the Trinity Formula as the analogical basis for his theory of how these great fetishes of abstract space, abstract labour, bureaucracy and the state are interrelated, and as a means of theorising their abstract, autonomous, quantitative and inverted characteristics.<sup>606</sup> This analogical basis stems from Lefebvre's interpretation of the Trinity Formula as an interrelated triadic theory of value, 'according to which there were three, not two, elements in the capitalist mode of production and in bourgeois society'; a theory that overcomes the binary limits of Marx's analysis.<sup>607</sup> This is replicated in Lefebvre's theory of the relationship between capital, space and the state, where 'the capitalist 'trinity' is established in space and interrelated to the state and fetishised abstract space.'<sup>608</sup> These abstract social entities combine as a whole to structure social life:

Neo-capitalist space is a space of quantification and growing homogeneity, a commodified space where all the elements are exchangeable and thus interchangeable;

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<sup>603</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 360)

<sup>605</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 330)

<sup>606</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 282)

<sup>607</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 325)

<sup>608</sup> 'That trinity of land-capital-labour which cannot remain abstract and which is assembled only within an equally tri-faceted institutional space: a space that is first of all *global*, and maintained as such - the space of sovereignty, where constraints are implemented, and hence a fetishized space, reductive of differences; a space, secondly, that is *fragmented*, separating, disjunctive, a space that locates specificities, places or localities, both in order to control them and in order to make them negotiable; and a space, finally, that is *hierarchical*, ranging from the lowliest places to the noblest, from the tabooed to the sovereign.' (Lefebvre 1992, 283)

a police space in which the state tolerates no resistance and no obstacles. Economic space and political space thus converge toward the elimination of all differences.<sup>609</sup>

Such elements of abstract space are managed and used as instruments of repressive rule by bureaucratic political power, which, while not a 'substance or pure form', it does '*make use of realities and forms*' by creating, controlling and fragmenting space.<sup>610</sup>

The abstract forms of neo-capitalism are embedded in what Lefebvre terms spatial practice: a wide-ranging category that 'subsumes the problems of the urban sphere (the city and its extensions)' and 'everyday life' both of which are in 'thrall to abstract space.' Spatial practice is thus where abstract space transforms<sup>611</sup> 'lived experience' and 'bodies' into 'lived' abstractions'.<sup>612</sup> Consequently, 'under the conditions of modern industry and city life, abstraction holds sway over the relationship to the body.'<sup>613</sup>

These levels of domination are interrelated and condition each other. On the one hand 'everything (the "whole") weighs down on the lower or "micro" level, on the local and the localisable – in short, on the sphere of everyday life.' On the other hand '[e]verything (the "whole") also *depends* on this level: exploitation and domination, protection and – inseparably – repression.'<sup>614</sup>

As a consequence, this multi-level theory of domination leads Lefebvre to treat social alienation as pervasive, yet at the same time inadequate for capturing the complexity of such all-encompassing domination:

At this level it becomes apparent just how necessary – and at the same time how inadequate – the theory of alienation is. The limitations of the concept of alienation lie

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<sup>609</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 92)

<sup>610</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 320-321)

<sup>611</sup> 'So what escape can there be from a space thus shattered into images, into signs, into connected-yet-disconnected data directed at a 'subject' itself doomed to abstraction? For space offers itself like a mirror to the thinking 'subject', but, after the manner of Lewis Carroll, the 'subject' passes through the looking-glass and becomes a lived abstraction.' (Lefebvre 1992, 313-314)

<sup>612</sup> 'In face of this fetishized abstraction, 'users' spontaneously turn themselves, their presence, their 'lived experience' and their bodies into abstractions too. Fetishized abstract space thus gives rise to two practical abstractions: 'users' who cannot recognize themselves within it, and a thought which cannot conceive of adopting a critical stance towards it.' (Lefebvre 1992, 93)

<sup>613</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 204-205)

<sup>614</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 368)



in this: it is so true that it is completely uncontested. The state of affairs we have been describing and analysing validates the theory of alienation to the full – but it also makes it seem utterly trivial. Considering the weight of the threat and the level of terror hanging over us, pillorying either alienation in general or particular varieties of alienation appears pointless in the extreme. The 'status' of the concept, or of liberal (humanist) ideology, is simply not the real issue.<sup>615</sup>

However, on the other side of his dualistic opposition, Lefebvre uses the theory of concrete space to outline a number of types of opposition to abstract space. These qualitative, localised, differentiated aspects of concrete space persist throughout the areas and levels of social space. They are also reflective of the different theoretical elements in his triadic dialectic. Lefebvre's notion of re-appropriating space and workplace democracy are aligned with the Marxian elements of his theory. His espousal of difference over homogeneity draws on the Nietzschean aspects of his thought. Lastly, other types of opposition, such as the qualitative space of leisure, the consumption of exchange value, and libidinal release, promote a type of opposition to abstraction through a politicisation of desire.

Lefebvre's theory of abstract space thus draws on his interpretation of fetishism as a concrete abstraction; it forms the basis of his theory of how social domination is constituted, constitutive and resisted in space. At the same time, the theory of space also incorporates Lefebvre's earlier theories of everyday life and of the urban form by showing how these theories are instantiated in abstract space. This formulation of abstract space thus supplements Marx by showing where the abstract, quantitative and homogenous 'great fetish' forms of domination emerge, and how they attempt to regulate life where they are socially embedded in contradictory social space. At the same time, abstract space is opposed by the qualitative contents of concrete space. Lefebvre's theory of space thus represents an attempt to ground and concretise his persistent concerns with utilising the concrete abstraction of fetishism as the basis for a theory of social domination that supplements Marx's analysis.

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<sup>615</sup>(Lefebvre 1992, 371)

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary

In this chapter I examined the role of fetishism in Henri Lefebvre's theory of social domination. I began by showing how Lefebvre's non-systematic interpretation of Marx conceived of fetishism in: (a) a double-faceted manner that accounted for how social praxis constituted the alienated concrete abstraction of fetishism and (b) their constituent function as an autonomous, alienated form that intervened in social life setting up (c) Lefebvre's dualistic opposition where quantitative forms cannot entirely determine content. I argued that this conception of fetishism and social domination runs through Lefebvre's work, where it serves as a basis for his attempts to 'elaborate, refine and complement' Marx's analysis by conceiving how domination is constituted, embedded and resisted in social life. I demonstrated this in three phases. My examination of the classic Marxist humanist phase of the critique of everyday life showed how Lefebvre conceived of his Hegelian-Marxian theory of objective and subjective alienation in tandem with his interpretation of fetishism and the total man. I then moved to Lefebvre's writing in the 60s, in which Lefebvre revised the critique of everyday life by reformulating the central categories of his Hegelian-Marxian metaphilosophical social theory in his analysis of the forced bureaucratic consumption of the 1960s capitalism. Such an analysis used fetishism as a basis for Lefebvre's supplementary theory of terrorist social forms that were embodied in myriad different types of alienation, all of which were no longer based on a conception of human essence. I finished by showing how Lefebvre transposed these theoretical interests in his writings on cities and space. These writings jettisoned the theory of alienation as an explanation of domination, but they still used a conception of fetishism as a form of concrete abstraction and as the basis of a theory that sought to construe how the social constitution of domination was embedded in cities and space. In all of these phases, Lefebvre's theory of fetishism as a concrete abstraction was deployed to conceive the composition and properties of social domination, which was viewed as being instantiated in social life in terms of the internal opposition between quantity and quality. This demonstrates that Lefebvre's theory of social domination is more complex than a theory of alienation, with his theory of fetishism as a concrete

abstraction holding a previously unrecognised importance within his work, in a manner that has parallels with Marx, Lukács and Adorno.

## 6.2 Evaluation

However, there are also some problems with this theory of fetishism and social domination.

This can first be seen in Lefebvre's interpretation of Marx. Lefebvre's interpretation is certainly admirable in stressing a non-dogmatic treatment of Marx. It is also forthright about how the gaps in Marx's theory make it necessary to supplement Marx with other theories or other theorists. Finally, in contrast to Lukács, it stresses the distinction between alienation and objectification, whilst providing an interpretation of fetishism that goes beyond commodity fetishism by stressing the compounded fetishistic properties of money and capital.

Unfortunately, the non-systematic manner in which Marx is interpreted and supplemented is problematic.

In the first place, Lefebvre's non-systematic interpretation prevents him from accounting for how certain categories fit into Marx's attempt to systematically portray how capital functions at its ideal average. Providing such an account could have lent coherence to his social analysis. Instead, much like Lukács and Adorno, this social analysis focuses on extrapolating from certain categories such as the commodity or the Trinity Formula. This means that Lefebvre's account of the genesis of the forms that underlies his analysis relies on a vague and unsubstantiated terminology, such as praxis, social labour or socio-economic form which are treated as constitutive of theories of social constitution. Furthermore, even when Lefebvre's revises his classical humanist analysis, he does not fundamentally re-evaluate these broad categories. Rather, he argues that a typology should be devised that might encompass them. Whilst these revisions do add complexity, the fact that they are not accompanied by a revised account of how they constitute or are constitutive of society as such undermines the explication of Lefebvre's theory.

This is likewise the case for the supplementary types of concrete abstraction that Lefebvre proposes or develops. As I have shown, they are accounted for by analogy or by positing that they are interrelated to particular Marxian categories. These accounts of concrete abstraction are potentially illuminating in some cases, such

as when Lefebvre describes how cities or space participate in abstraction. In other cases, the treatment of these forms as analogous to fetishism is questionable, such as when he talks of the terrorist forms of mathematics. In either case, the genesis of such forms and the corresponding accounts of why these forms possess fetishistic properties are often hard to decipher. It is not enough to simply posit that they interact with the logic of the commodity world, when the function of such a logic is not accounted for. Yet, Lefebvre's theory too often relies on positing such interrelations.

In the second place, this non-systematic interpretation is often combined with Lefebvre supplementing Marx with an eclectic array of theories in his various attempts to conceive of how domination is socially embedded with some degree of social complexity. However, rather than capturing social complexity or domination, it is often the case that this combination of diversely drawn theoretical borrowings clash with each other. This is noticeably the case in the construction of his triadic dialectic, where little justification is given for how or why the dialectic should or could be triadic. Nor are there adequate justifications for the theoretical incongruities between Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche that Lefebvre discusses. The same is the case for the eclectic array of theories that Lefebvre draws from structuralism, Heidegger and others. This means that his attempt to capture social complexity is often undermined by his predilection for theoretical eclecticism.

These reasons may go some way towards explaining why Lefebvre's social theory often consists in proposals and revisions rather than substantial analysis. Yet, at the same time, and as I have shown, it can also be said that the fundamental structure of Lefebvre's social theory is too simplistic. This is because, on the one hand, the basic categories of this social theory are non-deterministic and open enough to capture social complexity; but on the other, they are often too loose to explain any degree of determinacy. This is the case for the categories that Lefebvre constructs, such as everyday life, that are often too vague and residual to articulate how or where domination is socially embedded. Instead, these residual categories often simply seem to serve the sole purpose of embodying Lefebvre's interests, or of acting to encapsulate contemporary society. This is arguably less the case for notions such as the urban form, which has a more tangible object of study. However, once everyday life and the urban form are synthesised into Lefebvre's theory of space, the latter runs the risk of being so broad as to be indeterminate.

In addition, the dualistic opposition that runs throughout Lefebvre's theory is equally problematic. Whilst on one hand this opposition does have the virtue of positing some form of social life that has not been subsumed or determined by the commodity form, the manner in which it does so is reductive and questionable. This is because it seems that Lefebvre treats any form of quantification or abstraction as dominating or dehumanising, and any type of qualitative behaviour as resistant and humane. Such an opposition leads Lefebvre to bundle together disparate phenomena due to this reductive assessment of whether they are quantitative or qualitative. This leads Lefebvre's account of quantitative phenomena to include a disparate array of elements such as rationality, mathematics, and types of homogeneity, which are treated as equivalent to abstractions that compel human behaviour. Thus logic and the logic of the commodity-form are treated as equivalent. Conversely, on the qualitative side, phenomena as disparate as consumption, festivals, artistic creativity, grass roots democracy and urban living are seen as equivalent and inherently oppositional to social domination. This array of elements in Lefebvre's dualistic opposition can thus be seen to threaten to: (a) trivialise or over-account for domination by treating different types of abstraction and quantity as bad, whilst (b) over-valorising qualitative human capacities as inherent types of resistance, when some of them are bound to occur in any social formation.

As a result, and despite some interesting innovations that could potentially articulate where a theory of domination is socially embedded in the contemporary urban forms or abstract space, Lefebvre's theory of fetishism and social domination is problematic. In the first place, his interpretation of how fetishism accounts for social constitution and domination is under-theorised. In the second place, this interpretation is used as the basis for a series of theorisations that are ultimately unable to provide an account of how the constitution of domination is socially embedded, and which at points even fails to offer a plausible account of domination. The end result is that these attempts to supplement his non-systematic interpretation of Marx are undermined by the lack of a systematic account of his theories. Yet, at the same time, aspects of these supplementations might be drawn on for a contemporary theory of fetishism and domination; a possibility that I will now discuss in my conclusion.

## **Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

Contemporary critical theory, as first noted in the introduction, is faced with a dilemma. Whilst I contend that Marx's theory of fetishism provides an apt description of the current socio-economic crisis in which collectively constituted economic entities have acted like subjects beyond individuals' control compelling rafts of cuts, debt, rising unemployment and misery, contemporary critical theory has shied away from employing this theory. This has made its contemporary practitioners ill-suited to analyse the current epoch that was ushered in 2008 and seems to have no end in sight.

As it was also pointed out in the introduction, the important work of Axel Honneth and of Moishe Postone can be seen as symptomatic of recent attempts to revitalise critical theory by reinterpreting what is seen as its fundamental category, reification. Yet the manner in which Honneth and Postone do so - despite the specific strength of each theory - also has particular problems that make their reinterpretations inadequate for such a contemporary Marxian critical theory of fetishism and social domination. For on the one hand, whilst Honneth perceptively points out the theoretical inadequacies of Lukács, and by extension of the first generation of the Frankfurt School's theory of reification, these very same inadequacies lead him to jettison an account of supra-individual domination in favour to his intersubjective interpretation of reification. On the other hand, Postone endeavours to revitalise such a supra-individual account of social domination through his reinterpretation of Marx. Yet by failing to adequately account for its theoretical basis and its social extensiveness, Postone's reinterpretation falls into many of the same problems Honneth highlights in Lukács' theory of reification. This means, that like Habermas and Post-Habermasian critical theory, both Honneth and Postone's attempts are inadequate for a critical theory that uses fetishism to articulate a theory of social domination relevant to the present moment.

In this thesis I moved toward developing such a contemporary type of critical theory that draws on Marxian and Marxist theories of fetishism and social domination by providing a comparative history of fetishism and social domination that was oriented on drawing out, examining and evaluating the role of fetishism in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre's theories of the constitution and the constituents of social domination. Rather than an account that examined fetishism in the context of alienation or reification this comparative study focused on how fetishism was used as a theory to articulate the collective constitution of social phenomena that possess autonomous and inverted properties that structure, compel and maim individuals. While the term 'social domination' was intended to convey that there is an integral link between how these thinkers conceive of the way a society is structured and of these fetishistic types of domination that are held to be characteristic of this society.

I separated fetishism from reification for several reasons: (1) since as Honneth, Colletti, Elbe and others have pointed out, theories of reification provide a theory of domination that is too pervasive and inadequately grounded. So I hold that disentangling fetishism from reification provides sufficient theoretical grounding for a critical theory that is more nuanced and better articulated than theories of reification. At the very least I argued that providing a work that disentangles these two concepts, which are often conflated in secondary literature, offers a basis for the possibility that this type of theory can be developed, as I attempt to do below. As was articulated in this thesis, and which I recap below, this disentanglement can be seen in (2) the separation of the interpretation of what I termed 'fetishism as reification' - which attributes domination to the transformation of processes into things and the thingification of humans - from accounts of fetishism which emphasise the autonomous function of things and the manner in which they compel individuals' actions, (3) orienting my study in a different manner than accounts of 'fetishism as reification' or 'fetishism as alienation' by focusing on fetishism in the context of how it articulates the constitution and the constituent properties of social domination.

These underlying concerns and my theoretical orientation were substantiated in the preceeding study which critically examined how Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre conceived of fetishism and where I provided an account of how each thinker used fetishism in their respective theories of the composition and characteristic properties of social domination. I also provided an account of how each thinker's

conception of fetishism and social domination differs from each other's. Finally, I considered the coherence of these theories.

In what follows, I conclude my study of fetishism and social domination in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre by drawing out and substantiating these aspects. I do this in three parts. In the first part I draw together and compare my analysis of fetishism and social domination in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre. I also compare this analysis with the typology of approaches to fetishism and the histories of reification I offered in the literature review. This proves that I offered an original interpretation of how each thinker has conceived of fetishism in their theories of the constitution and the constituents of their theory of social domination.

In part two, I move to consider the relevance of these theories of fetishism and social domination by considering the coherence of each thinker's conception of fetishism and their theories of social domination. To do so I draw out my criticisms of each thinker and I consider whether these theories offer a coherent and cohesive critical social theory of fetishism that provides a rigorous account of the composition and characteristics of social domination. I conclude that in spite of the particular insight each thinker has into the manner in which social domination is constructed and the properties it possesses, each of these theories ultimately fails to provide a coherent and fully-fledged theory.

This leads me to part three in which I consider the relevance of these theories of fetishism and social domination for a contemporary critical Marxian social theory. I argue that in order for a critical theory of society to account for both the constitution and the constituents of social domination from a more cohesive standpoint, the question of genesis must be addressed. I also contend that failing to do so leaves criticism reliant on the standard account of fetishism which can be said to suffer from the same type of weakness Honneth, Elbe, Colletti and others highlight in their criticism of reification. The inherent tension that exists in conceiving that social relations underlie forms of domination without furnishing an adequate account of how these social relations constitute these forms of domination. Furthermore, while I believe this use of fetishism has some traction, I also think it does little to distinguish itself from other accounts of social constructivism, undermining its critical potential. This leads me to close part three by moving towards a full length articulation of a contemporary critical theory of fetishism and social domination that builds on this thesis. I do this by considering how elements of these theories might be integrated



into a contemporary critical theory that provides an account of the genesis, pervasiveness and the reproductive logic of fetish- characteristics of social domination. To do so I outline a speculative model that integrates aspects of Marx's, Lukács's, Adorno's and Lefebvre's theories of fetishism and of social domination substantiated in this thesis.

## **I. Comparing Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre**

As I demonstrated in my literature review there is a wealth of commentary on fetishism. The ensuing typology I constructed showed that the majority of this literature falls into a number of descriptive types, which treat fetishism as a type of mystification or domination. Since my focus was on the latter aspect of fetishism, I provided a summary of treatments of domination, which engaged with fetishism as a type or subset of larger descriptive analytic categories such as 'fetishism as alienation' or 'fetishism as reification'. I also provided an account of the histories that pertain to these types that provided continuous and discontinuous accounts of the concept of 'fetishism as reification' in Marx, Lukács and Adorno. I concluded that these accounts did not provide an accurate or in-depth explanation of how each respective thinker's conception of fetishism related to each other or how these different conceptions of fetishism factored into their respective theories of construction and the properties of social domination. I therefore oriented my study by focusing on fetishism as a distinct concept and I provided a comparative account of how this distinct concept is conceived and deployed in theories concerned with the composition and the characteristics of social domination. To do so my chapters on Marx, Lukács Adorno and Lefebvre focused on: (1) how each particular thinker conceived of fetishism, (2) how these particular conceptions of fetishism fit into each particular writer's theory of the constitution and the constituent properties of theories of social domination.

I began by focusing on Marx's conception of fetishism and social domination. Then I moved (a) to differentiate my focus on fetishism from the interpretations of 'fetishism as alienation' and of 'fetishism as reification' which I have presented in my literature review and (b) to ground my subsequent comparative study of Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre. In order to do this I began by placing Marx's early work in relation to his late work where I moved to distinguish my interpretation of fetishism from Althusserian and classical Marxist Humanist interpretations of Marx. In contrast

to: (1) the Althusserian interpretation I showed the continuity in Marx's conceptual structure of social domination and (2) the classical Marxist humanist interpretation of 'fetishism as alienation' I showed that Marx's theory of alienation differed from his theory of fetishism by lacking the explanatory categories of abstract labour, capital, surplus value and his monetary theory. I also showed that his constituent account of the social domination of alienated labour was premised on conceiving labour as an external alien thing coupled with his account of the estrangement of human essence rather than his later account of social domination in which people are compelled as the personifications of economic categories.

I then moved to demonstrate how Marx conceived of fetishism in his theory of the composition and the characteristics of social domination. I began by defining how Marx conceived of the object and method of *Capital* and his theory of value. I then outlined how Marx's monetary theory of value conceived of capitalism as a socially specific: (a) class-based form of labour allocation, (b) collectively constituted form of social domination. I demonstrated the former with an overview of his form-analysis of money, commodities, the class relation and a general formula of capital and the latter in my theory of fetishism where I demonstrated that: (1) Marx's theory of fetishism provides an account of the social constitution of forms of value that integrates his form-analytic critique of political economy with the reified social relations and the personification of things. (2) What I termed 'fetish-characteristic forms' describes the autonomous and personified constituent properties of these forms of value that invert to dominate and compel individuals' action. (3) Marx's account of these fetish-characteristic forms and their constituent domination proceeds from the commodity through money and capital - where these forms become more autonomous at the same time as their dominating properties become more concrete and socially embedded - and culminates in Marx's account of the Trinity Formula which provides an account of the constitution, the constituents and of the reproduction of the enchanted, perverted topsy-turvy world of capital.

This showed that *Capital* possesses the elements of Marx's conceptual structure of domination. In which Marx: (a) uses his critical-genetic method to account for the social constitution of capital by deriving it from the dynamic and contradictory process in which social labour appears and hides itself in the socially specific forms of value, (b) conceives of Capital as constitutive of sensible-suprasensible alienated and inverted forms of abstract domination that are collectively constituted and reproduced

by the socially specific type of social labour that appears in these forms of value. It also shows that the manner in which this is explicated differs from his account in *The Manuscripts*. In the first place, Marx provides a more sophisticated account of *Capital* as a form of social domination that includes abstract surplus value and his monetary theory of value. In the second place, rather than simply an account of the external alien thing, Marx's account of the constitutive properties of this social domination is premised on his more sophisticated account of the fetish characteristic personification of things collectively constituted by atomised production for exchange that inverts, dominates and compels individuals on both sides of the class relation.

I concluded by arguing that this conceptualisation demonstrated that Marx's conception of fetishism formed an inherent part of his theory of the composition and the characteristics of capitalist social domination. I also pointed out that this theory of fetishism is more complex than the accounts of fetishism as alienation and reification. For rather than: (a) simply pointing out that capitalist production consists in workers being alienated from the things they produce or (b) that fetishism simply consists in social relations being transformed into things, Marx's theory of 'fetish characteristic forms' explains how reified social relations constitute personified things that function autonomously to invert and compel individual behaviour. Finally, in contrast, to the accounts of fetishism and social domination that were subsequently presented, I also pointed out that Marx's conception of fetishism and its role in the constitution and the constituents of his theory of social domination was more complex than a mere generalisation of the properties of commodity fetishism. Instead his theory of fetishism proceeded to articulate the constitution and constituent fetish characteristic properties of more autonomous forms of value alongside a more complex and concrete account of their dominating properties. That section concluded with Marx's most concrete analysis of reality in the perverted topsy-turvy world of the Trinity Formula in which the fetishistic aspects of the Trinity Formula were derived from the socially specific character of capitalist social production forming an integral aspect of its constitution and reproduction through the distribution of surplus value and its constituents of domination in the autonomous and personified properties these streams of value possess in their reliance on the proletariat's reproduction of its own misery.

In chapter two I turned to the role that Lukács's conception of fetishism plays in his theory of reification. In contrast to 'continuity' accounts of 'fetishism as

reification' I provided an analysis of how Lukács's theory of social domination is based on his peculiar account of fetishism. In order to do this I began by outlining the Weberian and Simmelian and Hegelian-Marxian strands of his work. I then turned to the *Reification* essay where I demonstrated how Lukács's interpretation of fetishism as reification fused his Hegelian-Marxian and Weberian and Simmelian strands while also providing the grounds of the constitution and constituent properties of his theory of reification. I argued that Lukács's account of reification is based on his distinctive interpretation of commodity fetishism, which replaces an account of the abstract, alienated and personified character of things, with an account of objectified sociality. I then showed how this conception of objectification forms the basis for a double-faceted conception of fetishism that accounts for social constitution in terms of a process of objectification and the corresponding false objectivity of things that veil their content. I also showed that such an interpretation leads Lukács to analyse these objectified social forms as possessing the rationalised autonomous properties that fuse his Hegelian-Marxian and Weberian and Simmelian strands. I demonstrated this claim in my account of how this interpretation of commodity fetishism is constitutive of Lukács's theory of reification through his generalisation of the properties of the commodity form to the practical and theoretical types of reification that encompass a wide array of social institutions and types of consciousness. My account culminated by synthesising these elements in my characterisation of reification as mystified domination. I ended by demonstrating how the standpoint of the proletariat accounts for the constitution of the objectified and thing-like properties of reified totality. As a result, rather than reification consisting in a theory that is continuous with Marx's account of fetishism, reification or alienation, I concluded that Lukács's distinctive interpretation of the properties of fetishism is central to his account of the constitution and the constitutive properties of his theory of the dominating mystificatory properties of reified totality.

In chapter three, in contrast to accounts of 'fetishism as reification', I argued that Adorno's conception of fetishism was integral to his critical theory of social domination. I showed that this conception of fetishism and of social domination was not based on Lukács' or Adorno's theory of reification. Instead I argued that Adorno's theory of fetishism and social domination fitted into two phases: his early phase which conceived of fetishism and social domination in conjunction with his Marxian interpretation of Lukács and Benjamin and the relationship between natural history

and the commodity form. I then showed how this was exemplified in Adorno's macrological studies of fetishism. I then argued that the later phase of Adorno's theory of social domination is based on his conception of what I termed the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction. This notion serves as the basis for a dialectical theory of social domination that integrates an account of supra-individual social objectivity by conceiving Marx's, Hegel's and Weber's social theories as contributory to the constitution of the fetish form of the exchange abstraction. The Adornian theorisation was accompanied by an account of the constitution of subjectivity conceived by interpreting Freud's, Kant's and Heidegger's theories as reflective of this fetish form. This demonstrated the important role that Adorno's distinct conceptions of fetishism play in his theory of social domination.

In chapter four I argued against commentators that interpret Lefebvre's work purely through the category of alienation. I showed that Lefebvre's conception of fetishism as an alien, abstract and autonomous 'concrete abstraction' that inverts to dominate but not entirely to determine society, runs through his work where it serves as a basis for a series of attempts to conceive how domination is socially embodied. I demonstrated this in what I designated as three phases of Lefebvre's work. I showed that *phase one* consisted in Lefebvre's classic Marxist humanist formulation of the critique of everyday life. During this phase, I contended that Lefebvre conceived of social domination in analogy with the concrete abstraction of commodity fetishism as the objective and subjective alienation of the human essence of total man. I argued further that *phase two*, which marks Lefebvre's reformulation of the critique of everyday life, moves away from his classic Marxist humanist conception of social domination. This is because, as I demonstrated, Lefebvre enumerates a typology of objective terroristic forms of domination that are parallel to the concrete abstraction of commodity fetishism and replaces the standpoint of total man with a typology of social alienation. I also showed that Lefebvre's writings on cities and space mark a *third phase* in the evolution of this strand. These writings use Lefebvre's conception of concrete abstraction to theorise how domination is socially embedded in the production of social spaces while jettisoning the theory of alienation due to its lack of explanatory power. This demonstrated the important role that Lefebvre's interpretation of fetishism played in his series of attempts to theorise how domination is socially embedded.

As a consequence, while these accounts have no doubt shown that these conceptions of fetishism possess characteristics that are accounted for in the types of 'fetishism as alienation' and of 'fetishism as reification', I have provided a specific account of (1) fetishism and (2) the role it played in the constitution and the constituent elements of each thinker's theory of social domination, (3) the respective differences in each of these conceptions and theories of fetishism and of the composition and characteristics of social domination.

Furthermore, this comparative historical/genealogical account offers a substantial original contribution to the literature because it differs considerably from both the continuous and the discontinuous historical accounts that treat fetishism. In contrast to Vandenberghe, my contribution offers a distinction between fetishism and his all-subsuming category of reification. By providing a close and comparative examination of fetishism and social domination in the manner that I have done it also helped in elaborating starkly the elements that were lacking in Vandenberghe's analysis. In contrast to Rose, my standpoint also provided a more substantive account of how each thinker conceived of fetishism and of social domination. This is because I provided: (a) a different and more comprehensive evaluation of the role fetishism plays in Marx's theory of value, (b) an examination of fetishism on the basis of how each thinker defined it rather than assuming it as an unsubstantiated distinction, (c) a more complex criticism of the failings of each thinker. As a result I believe I have provided a substantial original contribution in the form of a comparative study of fetishism and social domination in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre.

## **2. Evaluating Fetishism and Social Domination in Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre**

I now move to consider the relevance of these theories of fetishism and social domination by discussing the coherence of each thinker's conception of fetishism and the manner in which they articulated it in terms of their theory of the constitution and the constituents of social domination. In order to do this I will recap my criticisms and then move to consider these theories' coherence and possible relevance.

As I showed in chapter one there are important limitations and inconsistencies that undermine the coherence and relevance of Marx's theory. The limitations stem

from the unfinished, ambiguous and inconsistent status of *Capital*. The inconsistencies stem from the object of *Capital*, which as a study of capitalism as its 'ideal average,' renders its relationship with a theoretical account of society and empirical reality problematic. This means that despite the fact that Marx offers the most sophisticated account of fetishism in relation to the social constitution and the constituent properties of social domination, it is significant that not only Marx's theory remained unfinished but that it also leaves out of consideration a significant amount of social phenomena.

On the other hand Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's theories provide accounts of many of the social elements that are lacking in Marx. Yet, as I also showed, the means by which they do this differ from the method Marx uses in the Trinity Formula to embody his theory of fetishism in society. This is because each thinker provides an account of fetishism and social domination by expanding their interpretations' provenance of Marx's account of commodity fetishism to the whole gamut of aspects of society their theories cover. In doing so, as Postone and many value-form theorists point out, each thinker can be said to have underplayed important aspects of Marx's interpretation of commodity fetishism - where categories such as abstract labour, or accounts of atomised production for exchange - are not fully accounted for. They can also be said to have differed with Marx's account of fetishism in the Trinity Formula, which demonstrates how the component parts of social reality are interrelated in the constitution, reproduction and social domination of capital. Furthermore, in their more excessive passages in which their theories of social domination are premised in order to articulate the dialectical characteristics of capitalist totality, each thinker might be said to have fallen prey to Marx's criticism of using dialectics as an 'abstract, ready-made system of logic'<sup>616</sup> as their basis for 'vague presentiments'<sup>617</sup> about the composition and the characteristics of social domination. These criticisms are not intended to castigate Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre as being bad Marxists. Rather, since they do not develop alternative explications or bases for these theories of fetishism and social domination, it is meant to point out the flaws and problems with their particular theories of fetishism and social domination. This can be seen in more detail by recounting the problems I identified with each respective theory.

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<sup>616</sup>(Marx 1983, 261)

<sup>617</sup>(Marx 1983, 261)

In the case of Lukács, as I showed in chapter two, there are several problems with his account of fetishism, of social constitution and the constituents of social domination. The first is the result of his conception of fetishism resting on objectification rather than on an account of the autonomous personification of things. Such a conception leads Lukács to treat domination in terms of objectification *per se*, rather than supplying an analysis of how the activity of objectification fleshes out and is characteristic of social domination. This is reflected in his second problem which consists in his deficient account of social constitution that never provides a sufficient articulation of how the class relation constitutes the pervasive properties of reified totality. Both of these factors lead to the third problem – it is unclear how and why reification is so pervasive and by what means it produces and reproduces itself.

In my account of Adorno I also put forward several criticisms. In the first place, I argued that Adorno's theory of the fetishism-form of the exchange abstraction, although in some ways an advance on Lukács's theory due to the socially synthetic potential of a theory of exchange, and his account of social compulsion, was insufficiently theorised, lacking a developed account of: (a) how it was constituted and (b) how and why it was constituent of so many pervasive forms of social domination. As I also showed, this account was contradicted and undermined by other aspects of Adorno's theory which held that an objective theory of society was not possible or speculated that the origin of these problems were tied to his mythical account of anthropology. I argued that as a whole these elements undermine the coherence of Adorno's statements that the fetish-form of the exchange abstraction is constituent of society and ultimately they undermine the critical theory of society that is based on it.

Finally, my account of Lefebvre also made several criticisms of his theory. In the first place, I criticised the manner in which Lefebvre's non-systematicity led to a confluence of irreconcilable tensions in his theory. I showed how this was noticeable in Lefebvre's account of the genesis of concrete abstraction and in the ways it was utilised in his critiques of everyday life and in his writings on cities and space. In the second place, I also criticised the structure of Lefebvre's theory for its reliance on broad categories, such as that of 'everyday life' and in his simplistic opposition between quantity and quality, which tended to group disparate phenomena together and treat them reductively. These points detract from Lefebvre's account of social constitution and the constituent properties of social domination undermining the plausibility of his account of fetishism and social domination.



Consequently, it is safe to say that all four theories suffer from some type of incoherence that undermines their applicability to society. While Marx provides the most sophisticated explication of the constitution and of the constituent properties of social domination, his theory is still problematic in that it is marked by instances of ambiguity, contradiction and incompleteness. Furthermore, it does not account for important social phenomena such as the state or provide much of an account of how domination is socially and culturally embodied. On the other hand, Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's attempts to fill these gaps *via* different accounts of social domination that rely on methods of analogical generalisation of fetishism to Hegelian-Marxian conceptions of society as dialectical totalities, do not provide coherent accounts of how these social phenomena are derived or related to their theories of fetishism. As a consequence it seems that despite many instances where these descriptions of fetishistic domination are compelling and seem to accurately describe the function of aspects of society taken individually, they are not based on a coherent theory that provides an explication for how these fetishistic forms are socially constituted, and as a result fail to articulate how they are constitutive of social domination.

### **3. Towards a Contemporary Critical Theory of Fetishism and Social Domination**

What then does this mean for the theory of fetishism and its contemporary relevance for a critical social theory? In the first place I would argue that the term is still useful as a critical category. For it seems to me that such a use of fetishism still accurately describes our current situation in the society we constitute collectively. Particularly in a time of social crisis, it functions like an alien, autonomous entity that inverts to dominate individuals. However, the profundity of this criticism in the context of theories of social construction and the egregious use of the category of fetishism in many different fatuous ways undermine the distinctive efficacy of such a critical category. As a result the concept of fetishism threatens to only be of partial use in a critical social theory. For such a use of the notion of fetishism can criticise the pernicious effects of elements of society as the unintended outcome of collective action. However, in order to differentiate itself from the fatuous uses of fetishism or indeed other theories of social construction - which by treating everything as socially

constructed they threaten to undermine the specific pernicious forms of social construction fetishism identifies - such a theory of fetishism and of critical social theory needs to rely on a more coherent account of how these social phenomena are constituted and how they function in particular societies.

In this purview the possibility arises that elements of Marx's, Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's theories of fetishism and social domination might be combined to provide a more coherent and relevant account of fetishism and of the constitution and the constituents of social domination for a contemporary critical theory. In what follows I gesture towards such a possibility, which tries to integrate Marx's account of fetishism and social domination in the Trinity Formula with elements drawn from Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre's theory.

However, in doing so, I think several factors need to be taken into account. In the first place such a theory will have to take a position on the interpretation of Marx it bases itself on. As I have shown it is not adequate to say that I will simply be using Marx's theory of fetishism since this theory includes ambivalences and is inconsistent. Therefore, I propose to base such an interpretation on: (a) Marx's monetary theory of value and (b) to try to extrapolate a critical theory of fetishism and social domination on a model akin to that of the Trinity Formula. Such an orientation will therefore focus on how different aspects of society are shown to be interrelated and how they factor into the constitution, reproduction and domination that occurs by virtue of the distribution of revenue to different streams that takes place in the process of capital valorisation.

In the second place such a theory should try to accord with the historic particularity of the society it is theorising about. This would entail taking account of the points made by political Marxists and which were raised in my criticisms of Marx. As Heide Gerstenberger points out, one should not simply take an abstract and a-historical model of fetishism and social domination and apply it to an empirically complex and historically determinate social reality.<sup>618</sup> In order to try to account for

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<sup>618</sup> In Gerstenberger's words 'this historical type of analysis is indicative of any analytical conception which presupposes the possibility of conceiving of logical analysis as separate from historical analysis and hence of any possibility of 'combining' both forms of analysis. Such presuppositions result in transforming specific historical into general forms of modes of production or else explaining them in terms of specific combinations of different modes of production. Form-analysis which does not eliminate social practice from materialist analysis can be conceived of as the analysis of

empirical and historical complexity it would instead be wise to endeavour towards the type of historically rooted theory provided by Jairus Banaj,<sup>619</sup> in which various types of social relations are integrated into the movement of the 'laws of motion' of the world capitalist system. Doing so would also address the charges of the sociological deficit and reductivist one-dimensionality levelled at Lukács' and Adorno's social theories by Lefebvre and others. It could also provide a means of grounding the ideal account of capital Marx provides for the contemporary capitalist society.

Such an approach would then mean that many of the historical bases of Marx's, Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's thought would have to be historicised. I claim this is particularly the case with the latter two. In Adorno's case a great deal of his theory can be said to reflect the golden age of Fordism on which his suppositions of integration, stability and the role of critical theory as a message in a bottle rested. Many of these theories and their underlying assumptions have been outdated by the rise of neoliberalism and the corresponding fall in real wages that have occurred over the past 30 years, the decimation of the social welfare state and the ongoing social and economic crisis.<sup>620</sup> For Lefebvre the same case can be made for his criticism of the Keynesian state and his advocacy of many of the forms of qualitative resistance he advocates, which as Stanek points out, have subsequently been integrated into what Boltanski called *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>621</sup> When Silicon Valley companies such as Google, in opposition to the rationalised types of Fordist production, base their corporate models on flex-time and encourage creativity in spaces designed to correspond to their immediate environment, many of Lefebvre's theories of qualitative resistance lose their critical acumen. I would also argue that such a periodisation could point out that the tenor of criticism should no longer be aimed at pointing out that culture and society are commodified. This is no longer open to debate. Rather it is now a question of demonstrating the genesis and pernicious

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historical processes of social formation. I do not think it possible to lay down generally valid rules about just how much 'history' has to be integrated into Marxist form analysis. The critical measure would always have to be the possibility of recognising those historical prejudices which lead us to define the result of very specific processes of social formation as general forms of a mode of production, thereby transforming materialist analysis into philosophy of history.' (Gerstenberger 2011, 172)

<sup>619</sup>(Banaji 2011)

<sup>620</sup> For an account of these developments see (Brenner 2009), (McNally 2009, 2010)

<sup>621</sup>(Boltanski and Chiapello 2007)

consequences of this process in contrast to those who advocate the social benefits of commodified culture.

In the third place I think it is safe to say that whilst less expansive than theories of 'fetishism as reification', Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre used the notion of fetishism in a too extensive manner aiming to account for too many social phenomena. This is particularly the case for the strand of fetishism this study bypassed - mystification and ideology - which I hold grants too much emphasis to the demystifying properties of the dialectic, especially when such demystifying properties are based on a theoretical account of dialectics that, as I have shown, is in itself lacking. At the same time this type of fetishism also tends to rely on too reductive an account of other people's consciousness, on assumptions of what everybody's consciousness consists in and on reductive accounts of other disciplines under the rubric of generalisations such as 'positivism'.

However, it is also the case that contemporary society might be said to uniquely resemble important aspects of Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's theory. This is due to the unparalleled privatisation ushered in by neoliberal policies and the pernicious repercussions such policies have had as part of the fall-out of the ongoing socio-economic crisis. This would seem to suggest that aspects of these theories are perhaps uniquely suited to provide an account of the constitution and constituent properties of how fetishism and social domination factor into contemporary society.

As such it might be possible that Marx's monetary theory of value and the Trinity Formula can provide a general model of how fetishism is constitutive of a society that has become so pervasively commodified. It might be also possible that elements of Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's theory could be used to address the gaps in Marx's theory by articulating the 'reification of the relations of production and the autonomy they acquire *vis-a-vis* the agents of production'<sup>622</sup> and the way in which these 'connections appear to them as overwhelming natural laws, governing them irrespective of their will'<sup>623</sup> which Marx's theory did not articulate.

Thus Marx's account of the Trinity Formula could be used to provide a concrete model of how labour is apportioned according to autonomous requirements of capitalist valorisation. This is the case for several reasons: (1) the Trinity Formula provides a concrete account of the constitution and constituents of social domination.

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<sup>622</sup>(Marx 1993, 776)

<sup>623</sup>(Marx 1993, 776)

(2) This account provides a schema of how the different elements of the Trinity Formula function in an interrelated, socially specific manner in the perverted forms of revenue that surplus value is distributed in. (3) These perverted forms of revenue account for the constitution and reproduction of the Trinity Formula, the personification of capitalists and of landowners and the misery of the proletariat. (4) It also forms the basis for how subjects are socially embodied in the perverted topsy-turvy world of capital. It therefore seems that this model might provide a good basis for integrating other elements of society into an account of how the socially specific form of capitalist social production constitutes and reproduces itself. This model could be applied to the social and cultural aspects of the theories Lukács, Adorno and Lefebvre offer, taking into consideration the context of neoliberal commodification. Rather than generalising or relying on underdeveloped notions of commodity fetishism - these elements could be integral components of an account on how elements have autonomous and inverted properties by participating in the process of value distribution and realisation *via* money and how these processes are indicative of contemporary society. In addition such a theory could draw on Marx's insight into the fundamental importance of the social division of labour and the highly contingent function of capitalist society.

On a supra-individual level such a theory could account for the function of the state by way of Bonefeld's<sup>624</sup>, Roberts'<sup>625</sup> and Gerstenberger's<sup>626</sup> work which has shown that the neo-liberal state plays the role of enforcing and disciplining privatisation. At the same time it could also be argued that the pervasiveness of exchange that Adorno analysed, only now becomes as pervasive as his theory, in an exaggerated way, assumed it to be. It may also be argued that Lukács' conception of crisis gives a good description of the relation between these rationalised parts and the irrational whole as seen in the local, national and international responses to the crisis. Moreover, Lefebvre's concept of 'abstract space' and his ideas proposing a sociological study of abstract forms might be a good example of how to embed such theory in empirical reality whilst allowing for some type of internal resistance and contestation. In addition, Lefebvre's proposed study of social forms of domination might provide a

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<sup>624</sup>(Bonefeld 2013)

<sup>625</sup>(A. Roberts 2011)

<sup>626</sup>(Gerstenberger 2012)

fruitful way of studying how these aspects of society and culture fit into the constitution, reproduction and social domination of capitalism.

Whilst on the individual level of subjectivity the pervasiveness of commodification and financialisation on individuality and subject formation, discussed in works such as *The Financialization of Everyday Life*<sup>627</sup> and *Capitalism with Derivatives*,<sup>628</sup> might provide documentation of how individuals are compelled by the imperatives they collectively construct in a manner that reflects aspects of Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's accounts. The same is true for the suffering and subjectivity such imperatives create which might be better illustrated by drawing on these theories.

One possible example of such a productive combination of these theories could be an analysis of the contemporary forms of cultural production and consumption discussed in theories of post-Fordism, Immaterial Labour and Consumer Culture. Whilst these theories provide adequate descriptions of the complexity of the global production process, global supply chains and the integral importance of cultural intermediaries in realising exchange, they do so on the premiss that these developments have made Marx's theory of value obsolete.<sup>629</sup>

Yet this is not the case with the monetary theory of value, which unifies production and circulation, as embedded in the Trinity Formula. Instead such a model could be said to be amenable to integrating these contemporary forms of production and consumption and by doing so also to integrate elements of Lukács', Adorno's and Lefebvre's accounts. For instance, an emphasis on Marx's theory of value being contingent on realisation in exchange which unites production and circulation, might be said to include the role of cultural intermediaries in advertising, IT, the creative industries and public relations as essential to the valorisation process, not as a type of immaterial labour that breaks with Marx's analysis. Furthermore the continuing primitive accumulation<sup>630</sup> through privatisation of public spaces or entities, often referred to as the *commons*, might also be aligned with the role that private land and rent play in the Trinity Formula, in which these newly privatised entities become

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<sup>627</sup>(Martin 2002)

<sup>628</sup>(Bryan and Rafferty 2006)

<sup>629</sup> For leading work in cultural theory see (Lash and Lury 2007; Lash and Urry 1987) For other work on brands and immaterial labour see (Arvidsson 2006). For consumer culture theories, see (Lury 2011; Sassatelli 2007)

<sup>630</sup> For other notable attempts to utilise 'primitive accumulation' as a lens for contemporary analysis see (Werner Bonefeld 2011a; Federici 2004; Mezzadra 2011)

outlets for the distribution of surplus value, by virtue of the way in which such privatisation makes phenomena necessary to social reproduction reliant on the exchange of money.<sup>631</sup> The manner in which this process also transforms these entities into abstract, inverted and autonomous entities could also be born out. If a more detailed analysis were to bear this out, this would mean that these contemporary forms of production, consumption and privatisation could be seen as constituted and reproduced by the same logic that is present in the 'Trinity Formula'.

In addition these developments could be said to carry with them particular objective and subjective types of domination. The former, which would extend the logic of compulsion addressed in Marx's concept of the 'character mask' to these cultural intermediaries, is particularly evident in the profession of public relations in which practitioners are embodied representations of the company, surrendering their very agency and subjectivity to the process of valorisation. The latter is also evident in this process of subject-formation of cultural intermediaries, which also has its parallels in the financialisation of everyday life, in the way subjectivity becomes a domain of the imperatives of contemporary capitalism.

A further analysis of these phenomena might then be said to provide an account of fetishism and social domination that reflects Marx's account of the Trinity Formula in the way that such institutions are collectively constituted but function in an autonomous manner as integral aspects of the reproduction and distribution of surplus value that invert and compel the actions of individuals in the complex process of the production and realisation of exchange. Additionally, such a situation speaks to the elements of Adorno's theory described in *Society or Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?* In which the extensive prevalence of exchange behaves as a conceptuality that holds sway in reality compelling and maiming the action and formation of individual subjectivity. Finally, the constitution of such institutions might be said to be instantiated as abstract spaces that are increasingly removed and out of control of the people who inhabit and resist them. As a whole the independent functioning of these processes and types of capital in the context of an analysis of the crisis might also be said to resemble Lukács's account of the rational irrationality of capitalism.

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<sup>631</sup> One prominent example could be the move to privatise public water as analysed in (Salina 2008). Another development might include the increasing privatisation of the internet in a time when flexible employment makes an internet connection necessary. Finally, these developments could be related to accounts of debt and privatisation described in places such as (Federici 2008)

If such an account and model can be substantiated in a longer work and applied to other areas of social life, it also raises the possibility of offering a variant of critical social theory that accounts for the supra-individual aspect of domination that Honneth's inter-subjective reformulation of reification eschews, whilst also accounting for historical specificity of this particular crisis-ridden form of social domination, which would seem to go against Honneth's narrative of history unfolding progressively. Furthermore, as it would be based on money and attempts to grasp the dynamics of a particular capitalist society, it could also offer a more concrete explication of social domination than Moishe Postone's account which relies on self-reflexivity and the seemingly all-encompassing negativity of abstract labour, without providing an account of how abstract labour is socially embodied or factors into compulsion and social reproduction. Finally, such an account would go against interpretations or criticisms of 'fetishism as alienation' and of 'fetishism as reification' by offering a theory of social domination that articulates how it is socially constituted and what properties these forms of domination possess as autonomous entities that invert to dominate and compel the society that collectively constitutes it without simply relying on accounts of alienated human essence or dehumanisation. This would make such a model relevant to contemporary critical social theory, whilst also making such a contemporary critical social theory relevant to the contemporary crisis-prone society, the possibility of which has been raised by this thesis and which I hope to focus on in my future work.



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